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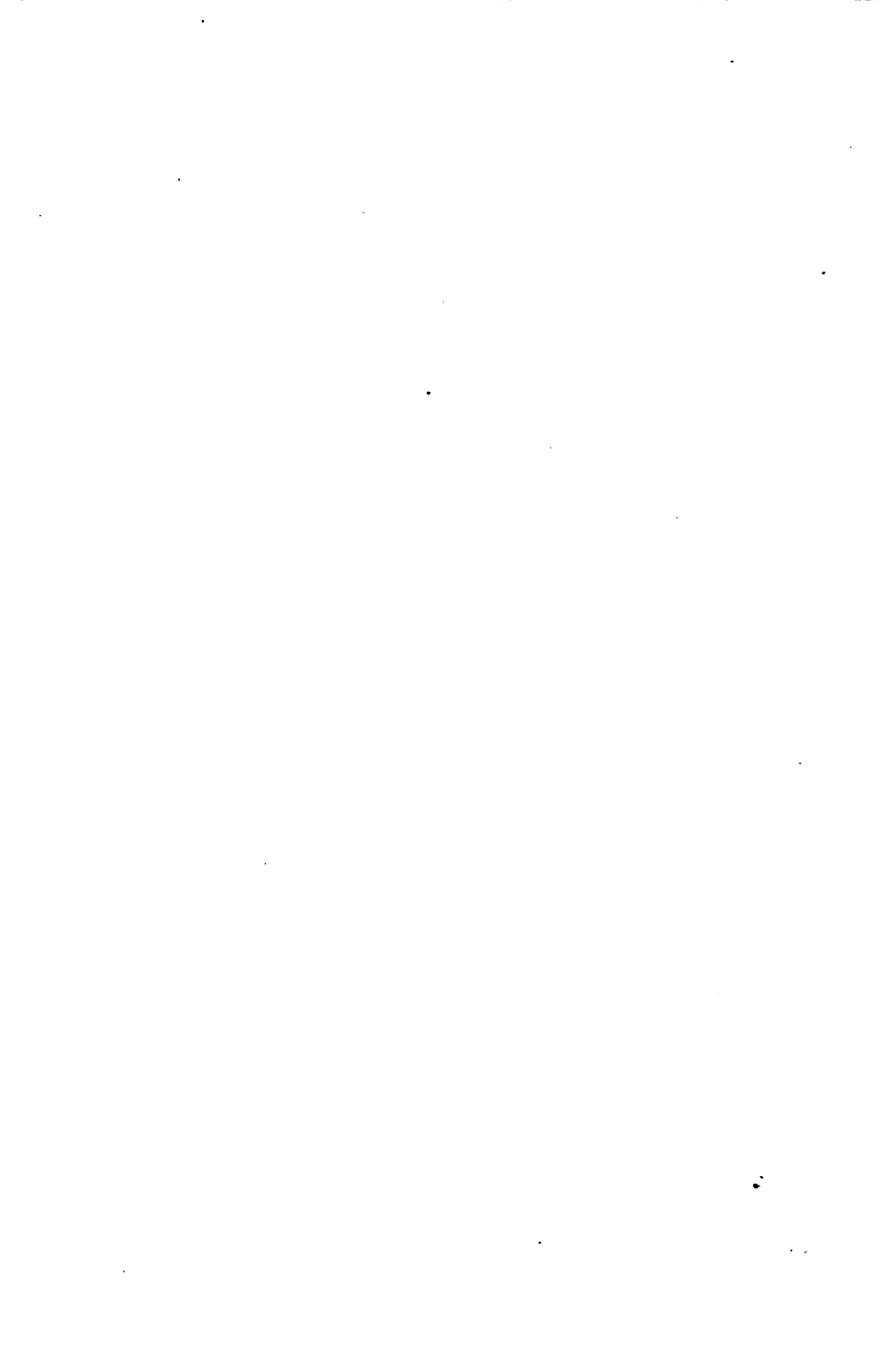
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IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE MASTER

SERMON OUTLINES ON ST. MARK'S
GOSPEL

BY THE REV.

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PREFACE

THE following articles originally appeared in the *Church Family Newspaper*, and as now published form a companion volume to the author's books on Sunday Collects, Epistles, and Gospels.



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE MASTER

I.—THE GOSPEL

"The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."—
ST. MARK i. 1.

ON the title-page of his Gospel, St. Mark writes the earliest Christian Creed—for the Creed of the early Church was: "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (see Acts viii. 37). And this Creed is the beginning of good news, for the good news begins with Jesus Christ. It is only when we begin with the fact of Jesus that everything else falls into its place as part of a gospel. And in the Sacred Name itself there is a sequence of revelation.

1. *Jesus*.—The good news begins with the story of a life lived under human conditions—an authentic fact of history. Unless this historic fact is true, we have no foundation on which to build. The disciples knew Jesus first as a man among men, sharing the common experiences of life. The reality of the humanity of Jesus was an essential part of the "good news," for it revealed a new idea of what human life might be.

2. *Christ*.—We sometimes forget that "Christ" was not at first a proper name, but a title—"the anointed king." So the good news is set against the background of history. The hopes of the men who refused at all ages to despair of the world are justified. He who bore among men the name of Jesus of Nazareth was the promised King "of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write." He sums up in Himself the expectations of a thousand years, through which the world was waiting for its King.

3. *The Son of God*.—It is not quite certain whether these words were in the original text. If they were added, it was a true instinct that recognized that the "good news" must

take us beyond the historic fact into the region of theology. Unless He is the Son of God, He cannot meet our deepest need by bringing us to the Father; the great separation still remains unbridged. St. Mark gives us no account of the circumstances of the birth of Jesus; he tells his readers, without any further explanation, that He of whom he is writing is "the Son of God." Behind all His words and deeds is the Divine Father, speaking unto us by His Son (Heb. i. 2).

II.—THE BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE

"John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."—St. MARK i. 4.

WITH characteristic abruptness St. Mark brings St. John the Baptist on the scene; the prophets had predicted that the coming of the King would be heralded, so now the herald appears. There is not only the baptism but the Baptizer, for the new kingdom is to depend on human agency for its establishment. A sacramental religion must have a ministry.

1. *The Need of Repentance.*—To men satisfied with themselves the announcement of an approaching revolution would not be "good news." So the first step towards repentance is discontent—not discontent with our surroundings, but with ourselves. For all true reform must begin from within. It is men's attitude towards themselves that needs to be changed first of all. Repentance is simply a resolute determination to be a different man.

2. *The Sacrament of Repentance.*—Repentance must express itself in outward act. Many religions have used ceremonial washing as the natural symbol of the inner cleansing that the soul needs. By public baptism the crowds that came to St. John committed themselves to a repudiation of their former manner of life. A sacramental religion cannot be a secret religion; it calls men out of isolation into the fellowship of a common ideal. So St. John demanded that his hearers should dissociate themselves by an irrevocable act from the old life of low self-satisfaction.

3. *The Outcome of Repentance.*—Repentance is the first step, for a man must declare war against the evil in himself. But St. John pointed his disciples to a fuller baptism that would not only repudiate the past but also reach forward to the future. It was not enough that the old life should die; the new life must come down from above (St. John iii. 3). By associating the laying on of hands with baptism the early Church expressed the twofold character of Christian baptism as cancelling the past and consecrating the future. St. John called men to close the door that led to the way of death; the door to the way of life must be opened by One mightier than he. "He shall baptize you in Holy Spirit."

III.—THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

"Jesus . . . was baptized of John in Jordan."—ST. MARK i. 9.

WHY was Jesus baptized, since He had no need of repentance? Perhaps the answer is indicated by His question to the Pharisees (St. Matt. xxi. 25). The King will claim immunity from no act that is included in the divinely appointed preparation for the kingdom. And while His baptism involved for Him no change of heart, it did involve a change of outlook. This change is expressed in the events connected with His baptism, as told by St. Mark. St. John tells us that the Baptist was permitted to see and hear what was invisible and inaudible to the crowds, but according to St. Mark the revelation was given primarily to our Lord Himself.

1. *He Saw the Heavens being Rent Asunder.*—It was as though the eternal world, pressing on the frontiers of the world of time and space, broke through at the moment when He was consecrated to His mission. The veil of the material world was rent (*cf.* St. Matt. xxvii. 51), that a way might be opened from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven (Heb. x. 20).

2. *The Descent of the Spirit.*—Through the open heavens there came, not a symbol of judgment or awful power, but a Power that descended dove-like, as It hovered over the face

of the waters as did the creative Power of God (Gen. i. 2). At the moment of His consecration, Jesus felt the caress of God, as love met love in the one life of the Father and Son. It was the assurance that the unity of the Godhead was still unbroken, though veiled in flesh among human things.

3. *The Voice from Heaven*.—Love comes down to earth, but love also abides in heaven. The assurance that every step of His earthly ministry was the fulfilment of the good pleasure of the Father came thus at the opening of His public career (St. John viii. 29). It may be that the voice represents a deepening of our Lord's consciousness of Sonship, the coming to maturity of the growth in wisdom (St. Luke ii. 52) that belonged to His humanity. It means for us that He was the perfect expression of the whole will and purpose of God.

IV.—THE PREACHING OF JESUS

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the Gospel."—ST. MARK i. 15.

ST. MARK omits our Lord's early ministry in Judæa. He regards the imprisonment of St. John as the real beginning of His public work. The way was now open for a new mission to carry on what the Forerunner had begun. What was the substance of our Lord's early teaching?

1. *The Significance of the Past*.—"The appointed season has come." He is not the forerunner but the fulfiller. There is no "other" yet to come for whom He is preparing (St. Matt. xi. 3). From the first Jesus knew that His Gospel was God's last word of grace to the world. The long time of waiting and preparation was over; the apparently purposeless course of human history had been, all the time, working out the purpose of God; and now the hour had struck, and the new age had begun.

2. *The Hope of the Future*.—"The kingdom of God is near at hand." The kingdom would not be fully established till the death of the King, but Jesus knew that it was coming nearer every day. So He invited men to enroll

themselves as the soldiers and servants of the kingdom. He called them from absorption in the present to give themselves to the service of the future. For the kingdom needed human effort to bring it into being.

3. *The Call of the Present.*—"Believe the good news." Believe, first, that it is *true*. Only those who believe in the coming of the kingdom can work for it. Men who are slothful, or apathetic, or in despair of the world, must repent before they can believe. Then, believe that it is *good*. Our Lord's first challenge to men was the question, Do you want the kingdom of God? Is a world where God's will is supreme the kind of world you desire? To men contented with things as they are the message of the kingdom is not good news; it was good news only to men who loved God and saw in His will the source of all good. So, from the first, the preaching of Jesus separated while it united. "The time has come," He told them, "to take your stand. Are you for the kingdom, or against it? The time for choosing is nearly over. Repent and believe."

V.—THE FIRST DISCIPLES

"Come ye after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men."—**ST. MARK** i. 17.

WE learn from St. John's Gospel that the four men who were now called had already attached themselves to Jesus; they were now invited to a more permanent association. So at the beginning of His public ministry Jesus gathered a little society around Him, for one of the keynotes of the new kingdom was to be fellowship in a common service. He gave a new dignity to human life when He said to men, "I want you." What did the new service involve?

1. *Adventure.*—They knew nothing of what lay before them when they responded to the call; they had no guarantee except their confidence in Jesus. It was only when they had committed themselves that He began to tell them what discipleship would mean. But the great adventure was first a venture of faith. To a brave man the risks of undertaking are an attraction rather than a deterrent.

2. *Renunciation.*—Discipleship begins with renunciation. The men who enlist in the army of Jesus Christ must be prepared to leave all for His sake. There is no promise of abundant recompense, for His appeal is not to self-interest, but to their loyalty to Him. Only when that loyalty had been proved did He begin to tell them that they would receive far more than all that they had renounced (St. Mark x. 29).

3. *Effort.*—To these men fishing was not a pleasant recreation but a laborious toil. When He called them to become fishers of men, He called them to no easy task. He told them that their lives would be lives of constant effort and alertness, often of disappointment and apparent failure, always of danger and difficulty. The craft in which they had been engaged had been an unconscious apprenticeship for His service, to which they were to bring all the lessons that they had learnt in carrying it on—endurance, courage, co-operation, watchfulness.

Jesus made clear the essentially missionary character of Christian discipleship. The little group of four were to constitute the nucleus of an ever widening society of men gathered in the net of the Church (St. Matt. xiii. 47).

VI.—THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

“He taught them as one that had authority.”

“With authority commandeth He even the unclean spirits.”—Sr. MARK i. 22, 27.

THE first question in regard to any teacher must necessarily be by what authority he claims the right to teach (St. Mark xi. 28). The scribes only claimed to expound the Scriptures and the traditions of the elders. But when our Lord began teaching in the synagogues the people were conscious at once of a difference. It is difficult for us to realize how startling our Lord's claim to supersede the traditional moral teaching of the Old Testament must have been to the men to whom He first spoke.

1. *Authority in the Kingdom of Light.*—The teaching of Jesus went back to the fountain-head of morality. He

called men to become as little children that they might enter into the kingdom. Like little children, they must accept His teaching in faith, they would verify its truth in the experience of life (St. John vii. 17). On all moral questions His teaching was final; there was no court of appeal that could reverse it. It was simple, as all deep things are simple; and positive, as all great things are positive. And His right to teach was vindicated by the fact that He lived out the moral ideal that He taught. The Church teaches only by derived authority; its appeal is always to the teaching of Jesus; but He claimed direct authority. Was it strange that the Pharisees recognized that unless He was more than a human teacher He was guilty of blasphemy?

2. *Authority over the Kingdom of Darkness.*—The first challenge to the authority of Jesus came in the form of a protest from a demon-possessed man. The powers of evil asked to be let alone. They offered a compromise that Jesus refused to accept. "We will not interfere with you if you do not interfere with us." But Christianity can never purchase toleration on such terms.

No evil spirit can resist the authority of Jesus. It may make a vain protest by "tearing" or convulsing its victim, but it must come out. It is only when human freewill is enlisted on the side of evil that it can resist the command of Christ. Only to humanity there is given the awful power to withstand the authority of God, and afford a dwelling-place to evil for a time, till evil destroys its own champion.

VII.—JESUS AT PRAYER

"He went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."—**ST. MARK** i. 35.

IN these early days St. Peter and the other disciples were gradually learning to know our Lord's manner of life. And one of the earliest discoveries that they made was His dependence on prayer. On the previous evening, as soon as the Sabbath ended at sunset (not "*ere* the sun was set"),

crowds had gathered to be healed. Such an exhibition of human suffering must have awakened the sympathy of Jesus; yet if He gave Himself to the task of relieving their sufferings, the larger purpose of His mission would fall into the background. So we may see in this "flight" at early dawn our Lord's desire to reconsecrate Himself to the work of preaching the good news of the kingdom (verse 38). Much as He cared for the physical needs of men, His deeper care was for their spiritual needs.

1. *The Time.*—In these busy days of the Galilean ministry, prayer might easily have been crowded out. But Jesus could not live without prayer, and the need of the body for sleep must, if necessary, be subordinated to the need of the soul for communion with God. He was just about to start on a missionary journey among the villages of Galilee, and so He went out to pray.

2. *The Place.*—Jesus came "eating and drinking," mingling with the crowds on the shore and the street. Yet He showed by His example that the child of God must sometimes be alone with his Father. Life becomes shallow and "fussy" if we do not sometimes "depart into a solitary place." St. Peter's greeting seems to suggest that he thought his Master was wasting precious time; he needed to learn that time spent in prayer is never wasted.

3. *The Manner.*—It was not often that the disciples were permitted to overhear the prayers of Jesus, but when He gave them "the Lord's prayer" He told them of the manner of His own prayers, except that He had no need to pray for forgiveness. It was about the kingdom that He must have been praying when the disciples found Him; it is still about the kingdom that we need to pray. For we cannot seek first the kingdom of God unless it has the first place in our prayers. In prayer we readjust our lives to the true proportion of things.

VIII.—THE TOUCH THAT HEALS

“ Jesus . . . put forth His hand and touched him.”—ST. MARK i. 41.

ST. MARK’S account of this miracle brings out certain characteristics of our Lord’s attitude towards human need. Leprosy represented human disease in its most repulsive and hopeless form. In our Lord’s attitude towards the leper we may see a picture of God’s attitude towards all forms of human suffering and need.

1. “ *He had compassion.*”—Our first question, in view of all the suffering of the world, is, Does God care? Can the Ruler of the universe sympathize with the physical and moral afflictions of men? Prophets had dared to believe in the pity of God, but it was the Incarnation that made it certain. All human compassion is the evidence that men have not lost the image of God in which they were made, but in the all-embracing compassion of Jesus the very heart of God is revealed.

2. “ *He touched him.*”—Sympathy must find expression in contact. Whenever we touch another life, we identify ourselves with it. Love desires contact, because love desires to be one with what it loves. But if we touch what is unclean, shall we not ourselves be defiled? Yes, unless our touch is like the touch of Jesus, that cannot take pollution because it is the touch of God. If a leper recovered, the first hand that touched him was the hand of the priest (Lev. xiv. 14) with the blood of the sacrifice. It is when it “ touches ” human suffering and need that the Church is sharing the priestly office of Christ.

3. “ *I will; be thou clean.*”—The leper did not doubt the power of Jesus; but could he be sure that He was willing to heal? The Mosaic regulations were designed to isolate the sufferer from human fellowship, and treated the disease as incurable by any human agency. The answer of Jesus expresses the truth that God’s will is always that men shall be clean. The only obstacle to our healing lies on our side. So Jesus asked another sufferer, Wilt thou be made whole? Christian Science is right in asserting that physical disease is not the outcome of the will of God, but of the dislocation

of things that has been the outcome of human sin; but it is wrong in regarding physical disease as the result of personal wrong-thinking.

IX.—THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

“That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins.”—ST. MARK ii. 10.

JESUS had returned to Capernaum from His missionary tour, and as He chose that city as the earliest scene of His “mighty works” (St. Matt. xi. 23), so now His return was marked by a new stage in His self-revelation. He had been revealed as the healer of the body; now He was to be revealed as the healer of the soul. The circumstances afforded a suitable opportunity for this new revelation. To the sick man and His friend it was an assurance that faith might receive more than it asked; to the crowd it was an invitation to recognize the essentially moral character of the mission of Jesus; to the scribes it was a challenge of which they understood the real significance.

Two special points seem to stand out in the story:

1. *The Relative Importance of Physical and Moral Needs.*—The physical need of the paralyzed man was so obvious that the fact that he had another more pressing need was only perceived by him and by Jesus, for it must be assumed that Jesus spoke the word of forgiveness in response to some desire that He detected in the heart of the sufferer. Perhaps the four friends who had brought him knew that his mind was troubled as well as his body diseased, and hoped that both might be healed.

2. *The Authority to Forgive.*—Jesus knew that He was throwing down a challenge to the scribes in claiming the divine right to forgive. But why did He associate this claim with the title “Son of Man,” which He uses now for the first time in this Gospel? Was it not, partly at least, that they might recognize that when He called Himself Son of Man He was claiming much more than merely to be a man. The Son of Man is one who, while truly and really human, exercises divine prerogatives (St. John v. 27).

Jesus did not, by healing the paralyzed man, *prove* His power to forgive, but He met the unspoken thought in the minds of the scribes. The *proof* of His power to forgive lay in His moral character and teaching; and this the scribes would not accept.

X.—THE NEW AND THE OLD

“No man putteth new wine into old wine-skins.”—ST. MARK ii. 22.

HAVING told us of the beginnings of the kingdom, St. Mark shows how it came into collision with the accepted conventions of the social and religious life of the time. One such collision evoked from our Lord the parable that sums up the significance of them all. By eating with publicans and sinners He had outraged the social conventions of the time; by allowing His disciples to relax the rules of fasting He had aroused the hostility of the orthodox; and a little later the laxity of His disciples in the observance of the Sabbath again brought about a collision with the Pharisees.

The general principle that He lays down is twofold:

1. *Outward Observances are of Value.*—The wine needs its wine-skin, otherwise it cannot be kept and carried. So outward observances are a framework within which truth dwells, and through which it expresses itself. Our Lord was not a moral anarchist, though He did not believe in externally enforced uniformity (*cf.* Rom. xiv. 5). He did not say, In the new kingdom there will be no social distinctions, no fasting, no Sabbath.

2. *Outward Observances must be the Expression of an Inner Impulse.*—What had happened in the Jewish religion is what is liable to happen in all religions—that the outward observances had ceased to correspond to any inner realities. Men had kept the wine-skin with care, but had forgotten to ask whether there was any wine inside. But that was exactly the question that Jesus called men to ask themselves. He tried to show that there was a meaning in the outward observances that He practised. Feasting with publicans was right—if it was the expression of the love that reached out to human need; fasting was right—if it

was the expression of the consciousness of the sin that had separated us from the Bridegroom; Sabbathobservance was right—if it recognized the Sabbath law as God's provision for human need, and not as a meaningless restriction on human freedom.

XI.—A TEST CASE

"They watched Him, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath day."—*ST. MARK* iii. 2.

THIS episode forms an important turning-point in our Lord's ministry. The scribes were asking themselves whether disregard for their authority was the deliberate policy of the new teacher, or whether earlier examples were only due to negligence. So they saw in this man a test case. Jesus must either ignore the sufferer or publicly show His disregard for their traditional interpretations of the law. Notice how jealous regard for religious propriety may dry up the springs of human sympathy. Notice also that the question at issue was not whether the Sabbath should be turned into a day of pleasure. The question was much deeper than any mere interpretation of the Sabbath law; it really involved the whole conception of the character of God. The scribes believed in a God to whom the meticulous accuracy of legal observance was of supreme importance (in fact, a God whose mind was like their own); Jesus knew that God cared supremely for the moral character that, like His own, was quick to respond to human need. So He looked with anger and grief—at once blaming and pitying them—on the men who so misunderstood God. Anger without grief—blame without pity—is not the Christian attitude towards men. In the act of healing, notice:

1. *The Cause.*—The primary motive was the compassion of Jesus for a man who was crippled. He neither sought nor avoided the challenge of the scribes. But He would not allow their malevolence to deprive one sufferer of healing.

2. *The Method.*—Jesus healed the man by calling his own dormant powers into exercise. He told him to do

what seemed impossible, and when he tried he found that he could do it. That is still Christ's way. He does not supersede human personality; He gives it power to act and overcome.

3. *The Result.*—The miracles of Jesus were acts of restoration. He never created the abnormal, but always restored the normal—made men what they were meant to be. He exercised supernatural power to make human life natural in the true sense; for sin is unnatural, and physical deformity is unnatural; just as life without God is unnatural, and therefore cannot endure.

XII.—SILENCED WITNESSES

"He straitly charged them that they should not make Him known."—
ST. MARK iii. 12.

MODERN psychology has obliged us to reconsider the verdict that treated demon-possession as a superstition that our Lord either shared or accepted. The supersession of one personality by another is becoming a recognized possibility in certain cases. To what order the intruding personality belongs may be hard to determine, but that it is evil is sometimes clear. In the case of these demoniacs of Galilee, a supernatural insight enabled them to recognize in Jesus the divine that was, as yet, hidden even from His nearest followers. But Jesus refused to allow them to give their testimony to Him. Why was this?

1. *They could not Learn.*—Truth is of value when it speaks the language of experience. St. Peter's testimony (St. Matt. xvi. 16; cf. xiv. 33) was the outcome of a gradually growing knowledge of Christ. "Knowledge lives from man to man"; the Creed is the summary of *human* experience, not of naked truth supernaturally communicated.

2. *They could not Love.*—So their belief had no moral value (St. Jas. ii. 19). It was a mere statement of fact, and mere belief in facts is not faith. We know the truth only when we love it. Our Creed may leave our character unaffected, and then our testimony will not be accepted

(St. Matt. vii. 21-23). It is love that turns theology into religion and sets the Creed to music.

3. *They could not Follow.*—But Jesus would receive no testimony that did not bring with it the pledge of discipleship. To confess Him as the Son of God without any recognition of what that confession involves is to put our confession on the same level as that of the demons (St. Luke vi. 46). The best testimony that we can give to the Sonship of Jesus is the loyalty of our service for Him, and that the demons could not give. When evil and good, the demoniacal and the divine, are brought face to face, the evil is forced to do homage to the good that it would fain destroy; but good will not accept homage from evil (contrast St. Matt. iv. 9). For what value is testimony to truth that comes from the kingdom of lies?

XIII.—THE CALL OF THE APOSTLES

"He ordained twelve that they should be with Him and that He might send them forth."—ST. MARK iii. 14.

THE expansion of the work, and the growing hostility of the authorities, led to a new stage in the development of the kingdom. Hitherto our Lord had used the framework of the Jewish Church, preaching in the synagogues. But now the time has come for initiating a new organization. He begins to preach in the open air along the lake-side, and He begins to gather His followers into a definite society. St. Mark distinguishes two stages in this latter process. Jesus first calls together "whom He would"; then, from this gathering of disciples, He selects a smaller group whose training becomes henceforth His most immediate work.

1. *The Inner Circle.*—What kind of men does He choose? Of most of them we know very little, but it is clear that they were neither influential nor learned nor men of the recognized religious class—in a word, they were ordinary men, with just the one qualification of devotion to Him. Because they loved Him, they learned and served and

followed, till they caught His spirit and shared His purpose.

2. *The Purpose of the Call.*—It was twofold—companionship and service. (a) Companionship. Jesus valued human fellowship, and loneliness, when it came, was part of the suffering of the Cross (St. Mark xiv. 37; St. John xvi. 32). His soul was cheered by feeling that He had a few loyal-hearted men around him. (b) Service. Communion must not be allowed to take the place of service (St. Matt. xvii. 4). If they were His friends, they must also be His messengers, ready to go or stay as He might command.

3. *The One Failure.*—Why was Judas included? Because no man is fore-ordained to betray his Master. When Jesus chose him we must suppose that his character was still wavering between good and evil. So Jesus gave him his chance. We are reminded of two solemn truths—the call of God does not supersede human freewill; and however near to Jesus Christ a man may be, he is never safe unless he knows his own weakness, and watches and prays that he may not enter into temptation.

XIV.—THE ETERNAL SIN

“Whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.”—ST. MARK iii. 29 (R.V.).

THAT our Lord's friends should have thought Him “beside Himself” is not strange. To men of conventional minds originality often seems eccentricity. In reality Jesus was never deliberately unconventional, except when the conventions of the time hindered His work. But the scribes were not honest men who lacked imagination; they were hostile observers, anxious to discredit the new teacher, partly through professional jealousy and partly through the consciousness that His teaching ran counter to the traditions to which they were wedded. They were unwilling to reconsider (as small-minded men always are), and so they started the preposterous theory that Jesus was acting under the inspiration of an evil spirit. He showed

them, first the folly, and then the sinfulness, of their attitude.

1. *Its Nature.*—It was not an act but an attitude, the deliberate will-not-to-believe, against which He warned them. The essential condition for all true life is sincerity (hence our Lord's frequent condemnation of hypocrisy—"play-acting"). When we refuse to accept a truth that we know to be true, and cling to a lie that we know to be a lie, we pronounce our own condemnation, and claim kinship with "the father of lies" (St. John viii. 44). Even God will not save a man who refuses to be honest with himself.

2. *Its Result.* Forgiveness is impossible while a man persists in this attitude (Heb. vi. 6; St. John v. 16). A man only becomes forgiveable when he faces the truth with an honest willingness to accept it. Conversion means turning round; it is a change of attitude (*metanoia*). The words of Jesus throw no light on the question whether the life beyond offers the possibility of such conversion; what He does say is that the only man who passes unforgiven into the eternal world is the man who has "loved darkness rather than light," and falsehood rather than truth. On our ignorance and stupidity God will have mercy, but deliberate insincerity is sin against the Holy Spirit, which means sin against life itself.

XV.—THE FAMILY OF JESUS

"The same is My brother, and My sister, and mother."—ST. MARK iii. 35.

THE hostility of the scribes was the outcome of malignity; but the hostility of the "brethren" of Jesus was the outcome of mistaken love. Yet it was not less dangerous, and Jesus found it necessary to detach Himself from family obligations, as He told His disciples that they must be prepared to do (St. Luke xiv. 26). Yet He did not fall into the error against which He warned them (St. Mark vii. 11) of disregarding the legitimate claims of family relationship (see St. John xix. 26). Human relationships were trans-

formed, not destroyed, by His consecration to the service of His Father (St. Luke ii. 49-51).

1. *The Enlarging Circle*.—The love that begins in home life is meant to expand in an ever widening circle. Family life becomes a hindrance to the soul's progress when it remains self-centred and exclusive. We need not love our own folk less because we are learning to love our fellow-men better. Through family, tribe, and nation we are meant to reach out to humanity.

2. *The Bond of Kinship*.—Love finds expression in unity of purpose. Family life is based on common ideals and habits. So Jesus claims as His kinsmen all who do the will of His Father. For it is only by the indwelling of the Spirit of God that we can do His will, and we are the brothers of Jesus through the "Spirit of adoption" (Rom. viii. 15) by which we are "born anew." We enter the Divine family by grace; we retain our right to its fellowship by obedience.

3. *The Law of the Family*.—Our Lord's "brethren" were plotting to hinder His work because they thought that they knew better than He what He ought to do. The true brothers of Jesus are all who give themselves to His service. So we may see in the words of Jesus an appeal for co-operation. "I will take you all as My brothers," He seems to be saying, "if you will come and serve and suffer with Me. I will love you as I love My own mother and brothers; but we must serve the same purpose and spend our lives in the same cause." Family life is the sacramental expression of a spiritual reality—the oneness of all humanity in God.

XVI.—THE SOWER AND HIS SEED

"Behold, there went out a sower to sow."—ST. MARK iv. 3.

WHEN Jesus turned from the synagogue to the fisherman's boat, He adopted, at the same time, a new method of teaching, expanding the "parable" or short proverb into a detailed story. Most of His parables were more than mere illustrations; they are founded on the idea that the mind of God may be seen in the world of men and of Nature. They

were, as He told His disciples, meant at once to reveal and to hide truth. Men must crush the ore if they would find the gold, for truth won without mental effort seldom becomes really our own.

In this parable notice :

1. *The Seed*.—The kingdom comes down—it is not the natural product of the soil. And it does not come full-grown, but as a seed. So He who was the Word of God came in immaturity and weakness, and the kingdom began in the cradle of a little child. Every word of God is a seed; it grows and gathers meaning, and draws to itself the resources of the life in which it lodges.

2. *The Responsibility of the Teacher*.—Shall we concentrate on the hopeful soil? Is it not waste of effort to spend our resources where there is little hope of response? The answer of Jesus is that the seed must be scattered everywhere. So, lest His disciples should be inclined to blame themselves, or lose faith in their message, when they found no response, He told them that they must expect this unresponsiveness. Not all ground is good ground; the problem of apparent waste meets us alike in the natural and in the spiritual sphere.

3. *The Responsibility of the Hearer*.—The hearer is not a mere passive recipient of knowledge; his initiative powers must be called into exercise. In hardened lives, or shallow lives, or overcrowded lives, truth is wasted. But we need not allow our lives to remain hard or superficial or overcrowded. The field cannot change itself, but, by the grace of God, we can. So, in His first parable, Jesus calls attention to the solemn fact of human responsibility. Obstinate unwillingness to learn may baffle the efforts of the best teacher, as Jesus Christ found in His own experience.

XVII.—THREE LAWS OF THE KINGDOM

“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”—ST. MARK iv. 23.

A NUMBER of “parables” or short proverbial sayings of our Lord were remembered by His disciples, and are reported in the Gospels in various connections. St. Mark

has added three of them at the end of the parable of the sower, because they bear on the character of the Christian revelation.

1. The word "mystery" might suggest to the disciples that the kingdom was to be a secret society, the inner truths of which were to be withheld from the "vulgar multitude." So Jesus corrects this idea. He was founding a Church as a lampstand on which the lamp of truth might be placed so that it might shine out to all the world. Or perhaps we may say that His parables were like lampstands meant to hold the lamp. Or, lastly, we may interpret the saying, as St. Matthew does, as applying to every Christian man, to whom the light has been committed that he may make it shine before men.

2. Revelation demands response. He who brings nothing will take nothing away. Intellectual indolence or moral apathy blind the eyes of the soul, and gain, in spiritual things, is measured by effort. A man must be prepared to sell all that he hath that he may buy the pearl of great price. Truth is not less God's gift because it is the reward of human effort.

3. What economists call "the law of increasing return" holds good in the spiritual world. We cannot stand still; we must either be increasing or diminishing our spiritual capital. We can only keep what we have by constantly reaching out for more. In material things greed is evil, because we can only increase our possessions (beyond a certain point) at the cost of others. But the wealth of intellectual and moral life is a store from which every man may enrich himself and yet leave as much from all the rest. To "covet earnestly the best gifts" is the right kind of covetousness; for God's willingness to give is limited only by our willingness to receive. But where growth ceases, decay begins, and we lose what we have when we abandon the effort to increase it.

XVIII.—THE GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM

"The seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how."—St. MARK iv. 27.

WITH the parable of the sower St. Mark associates two other parables about the seed, the first being the only parable peculiar to this Gospel. They tell us of the growth of the kingdom, both in the individual and in human society.

1. *It is Natural*.—"The earth beareth fruit of herself." When once the seed has been sown, it may be left to mature. We need not be perpetually scraping up the ground to see whether it is germinating. Modern psychology knows how much of the springs of action lie below (or above) the level of consciousness. Thoughts sink down, like seed, into our subconscious self, and mature into fulness of significance by a process that we do not understand. The same law is true of evil as of good (St. Matt. xiii. 26); each will bring its own harvest in the end, if once the seed is allowed to find a lodgment.

2. *It is Mysterious*.—"He knoweth not how" (*cf.* St. John iii. 8). All growth is mysterious, but spiritual growth is most mysterious of all. How character is transformed by fellowship with God no psychologist can explain; it is God's secret. We hear the wind, we see the harvest, but how and whence it has come we do not know. And as this is true in the life of the individual, so it is true of human society. The kingdom grows mysteriously. The seed our fathers sowed seemed lost, and yet in due time we, their children, reap where they have sown.

3. *It is Extensive*.—"It putteth out great branches." It grows up in our garden of life, spreading wider as it grows, till it becomes the greatest tree in the garden. In each man's life, and in the life of the world, the kingdom claims for itself the central place. Other seeds may seem larger, more conspicuous, but while they grow up and flower and perish, the kingdom still grows and spreads and increases. For God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty. The life that began in Bethlehem has grown into the life of a world-wide society, the Church wherein the Christ abides by His Spirit.

4. *It is Gradual.*—Jesus was reminding His disciples of the need of patience. They must not expect immediate results, in their own lives or in the world. Faith must learn, not only to sow, but to wait. The message of Jesus to St. John the Baptist was: "Be patient; the kingdom is growing; in due time the little seed will become a great tree" (St. Matt. xi. 4).

XIX.—THE SLEEP OF JESUS

"He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow."—ST. MARK iv. 38.

JESUS had been teaching, as He was wont to do, from the ship (ch. iv. 1), and when He decided to cross to the other side, probably to secure a brief interval of rest, they took Him "as He was," without waiting to land, and made up a rough couch for Him at the stern of the vessel, where He slept till roused by the appeal of the disciples.

1. *The Sleep of Exhaustion.*—Such touches as this remind us of the reality of the humanity of Jesus. Strenuous days of teaching and healing left Him weary, and though His disciples did not always understand His purposes, they watched over His health and comfort with loving care. Only when alarmed at the violence of the storm did they arouse Him. The Son of God shared the physical needs of the life of men; He did not lead an unnatural life, in which hunger and thirst and weariness had no place.

2. *The Sleep of Relaxation.*—The navigation of the ship was no part of His business, and He did not do for men what they could do for themselves. He never used His supernatural powers to discourage human effort. He slept, that they might be free to carry out His instructions. Sometimes God seems to be leaving the world alone, as though He were asleep. Is not His purpose still the same—that men may be trained to exercise their responsibility? When God had made man, He "rested from His work" (Gen. ii. 2) that man might be left free to exercise his stewardship. But God's "rest" was broken by man's failure.

3. *The Sleep of Confidence.*—The word on the Cross (St. Luke xxiii. 46) was the keynote of our Lord's whole life. He could sleep through the storm because He knew that He was safe in His Father's keeping (Ps. iv. 8). The disciples had yet to learn the lesson of confidence, and so He met their distrust by stilling the storm. If their faith had been stronger they would have let Him sleep on, knowing that they were safe while He was with them. We need to learn to recognize the presence of God, not only in "special interventions," but when He seems to be asleep (Ps. cxxi. 4).

XX.—THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EVIL

"There met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit."—**ST. MARK v. 2.**

THIS is the fullest account that we have of our Lord's treatment of a case of "superseded personality." The man's own individuality had become almost completely submerged, little being left but a kind of savage violence.

1. *He has just enough Volition left to run to meet Jesus.*—Our Lord drew to Himself all that was genuinely human in every man (St. John xii. 32). It is only the non-human in us that cries: "What have I to do with Thee?" and prays to be left alone. When the evil spirits prayed to be left alone, Jesus would not listen to them; but when the men of Gadara prayed Him to depart, He granted their prayer, for human freewill involves the awful responsibility of rejecting God.

2. *The Question of Jesus is the Question that opens our Church Catechism.*—In both cases the purpose is the same. Man's first need is to realize himself as a living personality. Modern psycho-analysis helps us to understand the method of Jesus. The first stage in healing is to bring the evil that is poisoning the moral life into the area of consciousness. The name Legion suggests the ruthless and oppressive armies of Rome. Jesus came, not (as men thought) to drive the Roman legions out of Palestine, but to drive the legions of evil out of human lives. In the answer we can see the human personality beginning to recognize its own

condition. He no longer identifies himself with the evil that has mastered Him.

3. *The Suggestion that they should "enter into the swine" came not from Jesus but from the Evil Spirits.*—He "gave them leave" to do what He knew would be useless, for it is only human lives that can afford a home to the spirits of darkness (St. Matt. xii. 43). Perhaps the sight of the swine rushing into the sea was the only thing that could assure the demoniac that his tormentors had really left him for ever. Evil always ends in self-destruction; in destroying its victims it destroys its own power of mischief. It was not Jesus but the evil spirits that destroyed the swine; it may be difficult to explain exactly why He allowed the act; but at least we can see that the destruction of a herd of swine was a small price to pay for the deliverance of a human soul from the tyranny of evil.

XXI.—THE FIRST MISSIONARY

"Go home to thy friends and tell them."—St. MARK v. 19.

JESUS was obliged to depart, but He did the one kindness that was possible by leaving behind Him a witness who might keep alive the remembrance of His brief visit. At the very beginning of his discipleship the man learned that the soldier of Christ must obey orders. Like the apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration, he prayed to be allowed to escape from his old associations, but Jesus "suffered him not."

1. *The Testimony of Experience.*—The man had no theology to teach, but he could give the testimony of personal experience (*cf.* St. John ix. 26). Sometimes Jesus discouraged public testimony (St. Mark i. 44, etc.), but where He was no longer present the reason for such prohibition no longer existed. It was the withdrawal of His visible presence that opened the way for the preaching of the Gospel to every creature. We may picture this man, not as addressing public meetings, but rather as telling his story to little groups of people, many of whom may already have known him by repute as a dangerous lunatic.

2. *The Start of the Mission at Home.*—Jesus warned His disciples that they must be prepared, if need be, to abandon home life in His service; but He never taught them to ignore their responsibilities to their own people (St. Mark vii. 11). The man who cannot witness for Christ at home is unfit for any wider mission. Perhaps the man needed the normal influences of home life to establish his cure; after a great emotional crisis a return to commonplace things and associations is wise. Wordsworth's definition of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity" expresses a profound truth.

3. *The Widening Mission.*—Service, like charity, begins at home, but it does not end there. Jesus did not tell the man to publish through Decapolis the story of his cure, but gratitude and loyalty could not be content to be silent. Christian men are sometimes too shy in talking about religion to others. What the world needs to-day is the testimony of personal experience, given by men who have proved the power of religion in their own lives. Yet it was not of himself but of Jesus that the man desired to tell.

XXII.—A CONTRAST

"Go in peace, and be whole of thy plague."

"Damsel, I say unto thee, arise."—ST. MARK v. 34, 41.

Few things are more striking in the Gospels than the variety of ways in which Jesus dealt with the sufferers who came to Him. He knew (what we often forget) the infinite variety of human character and need. So in these two miracles there are many instructive points of contrast.

1. *A Contrast of Circumstances.*—Jairus was a well-known and respected local leader (a churchwarden of the parish church, as we should say); and it was probably sympathy as well as curiosity that led the crowd to press round him as he went. But the woman is a lonely, insignificant figure swept along with the throng. And the girl, seized with sudden illness, is contrasted with the woman who had struggled twelve years to find healing for her

disease, and had come to the end of her resources. But Jesus healed both.

2. *A Contrast of Attitude.*—In the one case the initiative came wholly from the sufferer, Jesus' share being at first passive. In the other case the initiative was wholly His, the child being a passive recipient of His healing power. To Jairus the healing power of Jesus lay in what He did (verse 23); to the woman, in what He was. Some commentators lay much stress on the imperfection of the faith of the woman, but the action of Jesus gives no warrant for this idea. It is not "superstition" but humility that the evangelist sees in her act. In different ways she and Jairus are tempted not to "trouble the Master," and both receive the assurance that faith has the right to expect much.

3. *A Contrast of Method.*—The woman is, we might almost say, dragged into publicity; while Jairus is straitly charged not to make public what had happened. In the one case Jesus wanted faith to become intelligent; His purpose was not to censure but to encourage. In the other case He wanted to spare the child the publicity that would be injurious to her. Life, for her, was to be normal, and so He "commanded that something should be given her to eat." The religious life of children should not be prematurely self-conscious; it should grow in the quiet of home life, and not be paraded before men. The time for public confession will come in due course.

XXIII.—"HIS OWN RECEIVED HIM NOT"

"He came into His own country."—ST. MARK vi. 1.

ACCORDING to St. Luke (ch. iv. 31), the hostility of the people of Nazareth led Jesus to fix His headquarters at Capernaum. But now He returned to Nazareth, no longer as a lonely teacher but accompanied by a band of disciples, and bringing with Him the reputation of the miracles and teaching given by the lake-side. Would these, His fellow-townsmen, who had rejected Him before, receive Him now? It was their last opportunity, for we do not hear of

His visiting Nazareth again. St. Mark's account suggests three stages in the process of rejection.

1. *Astonishment*.—Our familiarity with the Gospel story sometimes blunts our sense of wonder, but to the men among whom Jesus had lived for thirty years His sudden development into a teacher and healer must have been a cause of profound astonishment. It is impossible to "account for" Jesus on any natural theory; His life is an insoluble problem unless we recognize Him as a Being of a different order, drawing strength and wisdom from superhuman sources.

2. *Hostility*.—"They were offended at Him." They regarded His claims as a scandal, a stumbling-block (1 Pet. ii. 8). That One who had been as one of themselves should put forth such claims seemed to be an outrage. By presenting Himself publicly He had made indifference impossible. Jesus is an offence still to men who want to go their own way, and find in His claims an obstacle to their ideals of life.

3. *Incredulity*.—Their unwillingness to recognize the truth created an atmosphere of suspicion and hostility within which He could not manifest Himself. To men of open mind, like His disciples, the truth about Jesus unfolded itself with ever-growing clearness, but the penalty of deliberate unbelief is that truth cannot reveal itself. Jesus wondered at their unbelief, for man's capacity for self-deception is one of the most amazing forms in which human freewill shows itself. Even Jesus felt Himself impotent in face of man's deliberate unwillingness to believe.

XXIV.—THE KING'S BUSINESS

"He began to send them forth by two and two."—ST. MARK vi. 7.

THE words indicate the opening of a new chapter in the training of the apostles. It became, from this time, part of the regular policy of Jesus to send them out for short missionary tours. In part, the purpose was to prepare for His coming to the villages of Galilee (since the original forerunner was now silenced); but even more it was a

stage in the education of the little company on whom the whole future depended. What did they learn in these missionary tours?

1. *Dependence*.—They had learnt already that while they were with Him He could provide for their needs; so now they were to learn that when they were absent on His business He could still care for them. Long afterwards He reminded them of the lesson (St. Luke xxii. 35). They were to go out staff in hand (Gen. xxxii. 10), dependent on the hospitality of those to whom they went. It was a test of their faith. At a later stage He told them to use all proper foresight, but sometimes a certain heroic recklessness is right (3 St. John 7).

2. *Concentration*.—They were not to go from house to house, turning their mission into a round of visits. The King's messengers must act as men who have a charge to fulfil. Their behaviour must correspond with the urgency of their message. How often we clergy need to be reminded that we must not allow the ordinary amenities of social life to obscure our vocation as the messengers of the King.

3. *Courage*.—Where the call was rejected, they must not hesitate to warn men solemnly of the consequences of such rejection. Their object must not be to leave a pleasant impression, but if possible to awaken the conscience of their hearers by a final warning, so that when Jesus came that way they might be more ready to receive Him. The messenger of the King must never allow personal resentment to influence his behaviour, but where the call to repentance falls on unresponsive hearts a last stern word must be spoken (2 Cor. ii. 16). God's offer of forgiveness and reconciliation cannot be neglected with impunity (Acts xiii. 51).

XXV.—THE TRAGEDY OF HEROD

"When Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead."—ST MARK vi. 16,

HEROD ANTIPAS, like his father, tried to use the political aspirations of the people as a support for his position. The earliest reports about Jesus that reached him represented

Him as a wonder-worker; it was apparently only later that Herod heard of His claim to be a king, and therefore a rival, as he thought, of his own hopes.

Shakespeare might have found material for a tragedy in the story of Herod and St. John the Baptist as he did in the story of Macbeth. Both are stories of the shipwreck of character. We see Herod at three stages of moral deterioration.

1. *At the First Stage he is still trying to Compromise.*—He will keep Herodias and yet protect St. John. It was probably partly to shelter the Baptist from the vengeance of Herodias that Herod kept him in prison. He has not yet learnt that

"White shall not neutralize the black, nor good
Compensate bad in man, absolve him so;
Life's business being just the terrible choice."

So he tries to patronize religion and continue in sin.

2. *A Character weakened by Self-indulgence and Moral Cowardice reaches the Moment when a Decision is Inevitable.*—An unscrupulous woman, a reckless oath, and fear of the opinion of others are too strong for him, and he stifles his conscience and destroys the one influence for good that lies within his reach. Like Macbeth, he is goaded into the murder against which his better self protests in vain. Herodias is the Jezebel of the story, driving Ahab to destroy Elijah.

3. *When a Man has sinned through Cowardice, his Nemesis comes in Fear.*—Superstition and sensuality constantly go together. As Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo, so Herod sees in Jesus John risen from the dead. Sin "has judgment here." But the only result is to stir anew the murderous instinct (St. Luke xiii. 31), and at last even fear disappears, and in the last scene Herod and his men of war subject Jesus to insult and mockery. A few years later Herodias persuaded Herod to go to Rome to secure from the Emperor the title of king (his proper title was "tetrarch." See St. Luke iii. 1). Instead of granting his petition, Caligula banished him, and he died in exile, deserted by his friends and losing all that he had sacrificed his soul to gain.

XXVI.—REST

"Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile."—**ST. MARK** vi. 31.

THE death of St. John the Baptist, and the return of the apostles from their first missionary tour, mark a turning-point in our Lord's ministry. St. John's martyrdom turned His thoughts to the certainty of His own death just at the time when the apostles returned full of high hopes. For them, and for Him, a period of quiet was needed.

1. *The Need of Rest.*—Our Lord's care for His disciples never failed. He was no hard taskmaster, indifferent to the welfare of His servants. He "loved His own who were in the world." The activities of Christian service lose effectiveness unless we sometimes come apart to rest. And this is especially true when success has been granted to our efforts. Quiet times of thought and prayer are as much part of our duty to the world as active service. So St. Paul "went into Arabia" after his conversion.

2. *The Secret of Rest.*—He did not send His apostles away; He called them to go with Him. The secret of rest is the consciousness of fellowship with Jesus. May we not believe that sorrow over the death of St. John drew Him closer to His disciples? He loved to share His joys and sorrows with them. The disciple who loves his Master will want sometimes to be alone with Him. But fellowship with Jesus means fellowship with our fellow-disciples. In drawing them closer to Him, He desired to draw them closer to one another, to weld them into a society through their common love for Him.

3. *The Purpose of Rest.*—Rest may become self-indulgence unless it is a means to fresh service. So, from the Mount of Transfiguration, the three apostles are recalled to the valley where men strive and suffer. It was only a brief respite that they were allowed before they "came out" to meet the crowd that had gathered. In human life rest and service alternate, like day and night; it is only in the life beyond that rest and service are one thing (**Rev.** iv. 8; xxii. 3). We must not yield to the temptation to send away the hungry crowd, for compassion on the multitude is a necessary condition of fellowship with Jesus.

XXVII.—THE DANGER OF TRADITION

"Full well ye reject the commandment of God that ye may keep your own tradition."—St. MARK vii. 9.

THE process by which the Mosaic law gradually came to be overlaid by a mass of tradition is one that is liable to repeat itself in religious history, and our Lord's words are therefore a permanent warning. Even in St. Paul's Epistles we see the beginning of the danger, and the need for his protest on behalf of Christian liberty. Why did our Lord refuse to recognize the "tradition of the elders"?

1. *It Overweighted the Law.*—In the effort to build up barriers between their own people and the nations around, the Jewish rabbis had made rites and ceremonies into an intolerable burden (St. Luke xi. 46). But Jesus came to break down all these barriers of separation (Eph. ii. 14), and to teach men that "love is the fulfilling of the law." If we turn the Christian law into a collection of detailed precepts, we obscure its real significance.

2. *It "Externalized" the Law.*—It made moral character depend on external acts. The regulations of the Mosaic Code served a useful purpose in preserving the separation of the Hebrew people, but the time had now come for sweeping away all these "taboos" and "making all meats clean" (verse 19). External acts are only of value when they express moral character. Uncleanliness is an inward disease, and can be cured only by an inward remedy. It is not clean hands, but a clean heart, that men need (Ps. li. 10).

"I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within."

3. *It Contradicted the Law.*—When men claim for their own standards of conduct the same authority as those of God, the two are bound, in the end, to come into collision. In the Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul fought out this question in regard to the claim that Gentiles must be circumcised. So here Jesus showed how the tradition that a man could repudiate responsibility for his own property by a nominal act of dedication made it a religious obligation to disregard the claims of his parents. So tradition

becomes the actual enemy of morality. Our only safeguard lies in recognizing that the Christian law is love expressed in life.

XXVIII.—THE "HARSHNESS" OF JESUS

"Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be fed."—ST. MARK vii. 27.

A KIND of harshness—an apparent unwillingness to give—seems woven into the structure of things, and once, at least, something of the same reluctance seems to show itself in the attitude of Jesus. Prayer does not bring an immediate response; the purposes of the universe seem to go on without regard to our needs. Does the behaviour of our Lord on this occasion throw any light on the meaning of this apparent reluctance of God?

1. *A Test of Earnestness.*—It is deep ploughing that insures a successful harvest. The story of Jacob and the angel expresses a universal truth (St. Matt. xi. 12). It is not the casual needs that lie on the surface of our lives, but the deep, permanent needs that often go down below the level of consciousness, that affect human character. If our prayers were answered at once, would not our lives become shallow and superficial? We can see in the Gospels how a boon easily granted often left men's inner life unchanged. We are not meant to be mere pensioners on the bounty of God; our wills are a real part of the motive force of the spiritual universe. It is this motive force that God seeks to enlist in His service, and power is developed in overcoming obstacles.

2. *A Test of Faith.*—Faith is confidence in God in spite of circumstances. It is the supreme venture that we make when we say that the only impossible thing is that God should cease to desire the best for all His children. The woman refused to accept the apparent refusal, because she knew that Jesus was incapable of indifference. Perhaps her own passionate desire for the healing of her daughter taught her that the Father in heaven whom Jesus claimed to represent could not be indifferent to any of the needs of His children. Our Lord had spoken to His disciples of the

power of faith; now He gave them an object-lesson of how it could meet and overcome discouragement. "This is the victory that overcometh the world." Faith is not only conscious dependence; it is also the vigorous initiative of the soul, the high courage that is not daunted by apparent impossibilities. It is the heroic element in the Christian religion, that dares to say that the only really impossible thing in the universe is the indifference of God.

XXIX.—THE CHILDREN AND THE DOGS

"The dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."—ST. MARK vii. 28.

ONE of the purposes that our Lord had in view in the training of His disciples was to break down the age-long barrier of prejudice and hostility that separated them from the Gentile world. While He never asked them to lay aside their patriotic pride in their own nation, He led them gradually to see that loyalty to their own nation must not lead them to ignore the claims of the larger human brotherhood. In this incident we can see a stage in this process of training.

1. To the Jew, the pariah dogs who wandered about, savage, hungry, and unclean, were a fit symbol of the Gentile world. Both were objects of contempt and fear, with no rights that need be respected, and no claims to food or shelter. No doubt the Jew was often kinder than his creed, but the isolation from the heathen world that the law prescribed dried up the springs of human sympathy among the most pious of the people.

2. The word used by Jesus here was the diminutive ("doggie"), and suggests, not the ownerless pariah dogs, but the little dogs kept in the household. In using it He "domesticated the Gentile world," and brought these aliens into the household of the Father, where their claim to shelter and food is recognized. He still asserts the special claim of the Jew, for the time had not yet come when the children's bread should be offered to those who had only gathered the crumbs, but they were to think of the Gentiles

as members of the same household when they chose, like the woman in the story, to claim their place there.

3. The death of Christ was the final breaking of the barrier (Eph. ii. 13). Those who had been admitted as dogs into the family were now raised to the status of sonship; they who had eaten of the crumbs were invited to share the feast. The Jewish Christian had to learn the lesson that is still so hard to learn—that God has no favourites, with a preferential right to His care and love. With beautiful humility the woman asked only for the right that the dog in the house might claim; but Jesus knew that in a little while the invitation would go out to all the Gentile world to enter into the status of sonship and share the blessings of the kingdom.

XXX.—THE BURDEN OF SERVICE

“ Looking up to heaven, He sighed.”—St. MARK vii. 34.

As the ministry of Jesus went on the disciples seem to have recognized a gradual change. At first virtue seemed to flow out of Him in inexhaustible supply. Crowds gathered to be healed by a touch or by a word. But as time went on a greater sense of effort appears, a greater reluctance to exhibit publicly His powers of healing. So the evangelist regards the “ groan ” that accompanied the act of healing as significant.

1. *It was a Sigh of Effort.*—Perhaps the difficulty of evoking faith in a man who was deaf and dumb was the primary cause, but the unresponsiveness of the individual sufferer was a picture of the unresponsiveness that had followed the early enthusiasm of the people (St. Mark vi. 5). His appeal, “ He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,” too often evoked no response of effort. The burden of service lay heavy on Him because those whom He sought to serve were apathetic and sluggish in soul. How gladly He welcomed the real response of faith when He found it (ch. v. 34; vii. 29).

2. *It was a Sigh of Compassion.*—Jesus was not habitually melancholy and depressed; His word to His

disciples was often "Be of good cheer." Yet at times the burden of the sorrow and suffering of the world lay heavy upon Him. He did not adopt the stoic attitude of detachment, for He came to show men that their Father in heaven was not indifferent to their needs. The spirit of God shares the burden of the world's sorrow (Rom. viii. 26).

The sigh of Jesus illustrates the meaning of the second beatitude—the blessedness of those who mourn.

"The Son of God in doing good
Was fain to look to heaven and sigh;
And shall the heirs of sinful blood
Seek joy unmixed in charity?"

But our "mourning" is only like that of Jesus if it is associated with faith and effort—faith that looks up to heaven for strength to endure, and effort that reaches out to heal and restore. Mere depression has no spiritual value. Christian sorrow is only the sigh that intervenes between the consciousness of human need and the consciousness of divine provision.

XXXI.—ESTIMATING OUR RESOURCES

"How many loaves have ye?"—ST. MARK viii. 5.

WHEN our Lord presented to His disciples the problem of the hungry multitude they were inclined to take refuge in the plea of helplessness, "We can do nothing." But He would not accept this answer, for the emergency called for the pooling of whatever resources they had.

1. It was part of His method of training of His disciples to make them feel at every emergency that He depended on them. Perhaps they were thinking, "We want the few loaves for ourselves"; or perhaps they felt that what they had was so ludicrously inadequate that it was not worth considering; or perhaps they hoped that He would command the stones to become bread, and feed the multitude without asking for the sacrifice of their little store. How often we are discouraged by the thought that we have so little to offer. The first call is for a reckoning of our resources. We may find that they are larger than we

thought, but, large or small, we must know what they are. We say we cannot afford this expense; we have no time for this act of service; we are not clever enough, or influential enough, to help effectively. But are we right?

2. Between our inadequate resources and the world's need is the power of the divine Master. Without Him we can do nothing. Philanthropy cannot save the world unless it rests on the foundation of faith. The vast scale of our social and industrial problems might well lead us to despair of the world unless we believed that His "touch has still its ancient power."

3. They gave seven loaves; they received seven baskets full. For as yet their faith needed the assurance of visible evidence. But when they had learnt the lesson they gave their all in His service in the assurance that He would repay an hundredfold in His own good time. Our lives are enriched by what they give, if the motive of our giving is devotion to Christ. The disciples did not give the seven loaves in order to gain seven baskets full; they gave because He asked, and because they gave freely they received far more than they gave. The number of the loaves is symbolical, for seven was symbolical of completeness in Hebrew thought. According to the completeness of their sacrifice was the completeness of their reward.

XXXII.—THE DANGER OF FALSE DOCTRINE

"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod."
—ST. MARK viii. 15.

FRESH from an altercation with the Pharisees, our Lord and His disciples had taken ship to cross the lake, and just as the disciples were reproaching themselves that in the hurry of departure they had forgotten to replenish their stores, He turned their thoughts into a parable by warning them against the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. The leaven of the Pharisees was hypocrisy (St. Luke xii. 1); and the leaven of Herod (or, according to St. Matthew xvi. 6, of the Sadducees) was worldliness. Excepting in the parable of St. Matthew xiii. 33, leaven is always, in the New

Testament, a symbol of evil (see 1 Cor. v. 6 ff.). Notice three characteristics of leaven, in their bearing on the warning of Jesus:

1. *Its Small Beginnings*.—"A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Insincerity or worldliness begin almost imperceptibly in human characters. The disciples were simple-minded men, easily deceived. Into one of them (Judas) the leaven of Herod had already entered. It is the first beginnings of false thinking against which we need to watch. Perhaps the demand of the Pharisees for a sign from heaven had begun to stir thoughts in the minds of the disciples, and so Jesus found it necessary to remind them that there was no sincerity behind the request.

2. *Its Gradual Increase*.—Once admitted, leaven grows. False ideals of life spread gradually through the whole character. Human character is like dough, neither good nor evil in itself, but responsive to the influence of the leaven that falls into it. Leavened dough was used to start fermentation in other dough. So evil spreads from one character to another.

3. *Its Final Result*.—The process of leavening was regarded as a kind of putrefaction. The whole mass gradually becomes sour and fermented. (Yeast does not produce the same sour effect.) So the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and the worldliness of the Herodian Sadducees, had corrupted their whole outlook on life. Only by being born again could they see the kingdom of God. Only the grace of God can check the growth of evil once admitted into the inner life.

XXXIII.—DULNESS OF APPREHENSION

"How is it that ye do not understand?"—ST. MARK viii. 21.

OUR Lord never doubted the loyalty of His disciples, but their slowness of understanding often grieved Him (see St. Mark vi. 52; vii. 18; x. 14; xvi. 14). He was not content with mere unintelligent obedience; like every true preacher, He wanted to call into exercise their powers of thought and imagination. Mental indolence is quite as real a sin as any other kind of negligence, for we cannot do the will of God

unless we understand it, and the great Teacher, the Holy Spirit, is baffled by our dulness of apprehension. Jesus seems to indicate several reasons for the slow-mindedness of His disciples.

1. *Hardness of Heart*.—Several times he complained of their hardness or slowness of heart. He who desires to learn must first be willing to be taught. It is not only sin that hardens men's hearts (Heb. iii. 13); habits and conventions may form a crust through which new truth cannot penetrate. The disciples had been brought up in a certain circle of ideas, and the stern words of Jesus were needed to rouse them to the effort that was needed to enter into a new way of thinking. They had to be converted and become as little children before they could enter into the new kingdom. Humility is the first qualification needed for the learner in the school of Jesus.

2. *Lack of Perception*.—They had not learned to use the faculties that they had; their eyes had not learned to see, nor their ears to hear. They were only half awake to the facts. As we read the Gospels, are we not liable to the same charge? What we need is not a fuller revelation, but more insight into the meaning of the revelation already given. The Psalmist's prayer (Ps. cxix. 18) is one that we all need to pray.

3. *Forgetfulness*.—"Do ye not remember?" We are sometimes astonished at the forgetfulness of the disciples, but do we not constantly forget? Jesus instituted the Eucharist as a sacrament of remembrance, because He knew how prone men are to forget. Remembrance is the parent of watchfulness (Rev. iii. 3), of encouragement (St. John xvi. 4), and of gratitude (Ps. xxx. 4).

XXXIV.—PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

"He was restored, and saw every man clearly."—ST. MARK viii. 25.

THE remarkable feature of this miracle is the gradual character of the process of restoration. We have noticed already that a certain sense of effort belongs to many of our Lord's later miracles, and in this case the blind man is,

at first, a merely passive figure brought by his friends to Jesus. Unlike blind Bartimæus, he makes no appeal for himself. We may think of him as like a man whose faith is largely the outcome of his environment, scarcely yet a personal possession.

1. Jesus took him by the hand and led him aside. His first need was the assurance of the sympathy of Jesus, and the awakening of confidence. So he is led away from his ordinary environment into a quiet place outside the village. For faith grows in the quiet places, where a man feels himself alone with God. Unless we sometimes allow ourselves to be led away from the distractions and activities of ordinary life the dormant powers of the soul have no opportunity of being called into exercise.

2. He moistened his eyes and laid His hands on him. And as faith began to stir in response to the touch of Jesus, the confused consciousness of a new world began to awaken. His mind cannot yet interpret what his eyes have begun to see. The process of enlightenment often passes through this stage of confusion. We must not be discouraged if the meaning of the new world of spiritual experience does not at once become clear.

3. He saw all things clear. The patient skill of the great Physician had trained the faith of the man till it was able to respond. And as the new faith still needed to grow to maturity, Jesus told him not to enter into the village, where an eager crowd would be ready with its questions, but to go home quietly and realize with thankfulness what He had done for him. The Christian life does not grow best in the atmosphere of publicity, and faith that has been hard to awaken needs to mature in the quiet process of self-realization.

XXXV.—THE GREAT CONFESSION

"Peter answered and saith unto Him, Thou art the Christ."—*ST. MARK* viii. 29.

ALL three evangelists recognize this visit to Cæsarea Philippi as a definite turning-point in our Lord's ministry. The Galilean ministry was finished; an adequate oppor-

tunity had been afforded for men to define their attitude towards Him. So now the disciples were invited to give their verdict.

1. *The Verdict of the People.*—The purpose of our Lord in asking this preliminary question was probably to help the disciples to realize the separation that existed between real discipleship and the attitude of friendly outsiders. The people of Galilee did not share the hostility of the Pharisees; they were prepared to give to Jesus a place among the company of the prophets whose work it was to prepare for the coming of the Christ (*cf.* ch. vi. 15). So far reason led them; but the spiritual instinct that would have led them further was dormant.

2. *The Verdict of the Disciples.*—St. Peter was the spokesman of the whole company in the confession "Thou art the Christ." What was implied in the confession? It was a solemn reassertion of the truth that they had felt from the beginning (St. John i. 41). It was a declaration that Jesus was not a prophet sent to prepare for the Christ, but was Himself the final fulfilment of all the hopes of a thousand years (St. John i. 45), the divinely appointed deliverer for whom the world was waiting. It may not have amounted to a full confession of His divinity (though St. Matthew's version of the incident adds the words "the Son of God"), but it meant that the disciples definitely detached themselves from the popular verdict and committed themselves unreservedly to the cause of Jesus.

3. *The Supreme Question.*—There comes a time in every man's life when he must face the question, What think ye of Christ? Few men will deny Him a place among the great prophets of the world. But is this enough? To recognize Him as the Christ is to recognize His unique authority, His unique claim to allegiance and service. The blessing (not recorded by St. Mark) pronounced on St. Peter is the blessing of Jesus on all who enrol themselves in His kingdom. To confess Him as Christ is to recognize His authority as supreme. Only to those who own Him as their King will He reveal the meaning of His Cross. "Thou art the Christ" means "For life or death, for failure or success, we are committed to Thy service."

XXXVI.—THE NECESSITY OF THE CROSS

"The Son of Man must suffer many things."—ST. MARK viii. 31.

It is a law of the Christian life that only when we have committed ourselves to the service do we learn to know what it involves. So now Jesus began to tell His disciples in plain words what He had only hinted obscurely before. Suffering, rejection, death, were the divinely appointed destiny of the Christ. Think of this revelation:

1. *In Relation to Himself.*—Perhaps it would not be too much to say that only after the failure of His ministry in Galilee did all that lay before Him become clear to the human consciousness of Jesus. He saw three things. First, that the Christ would be rejected and killed. To claim that title was to accept that destiny. Then, secondly, He saw that all this was no mere tragedy, but the purpose of the Father (Acts ii. 23). In no other way could He enter into His glory (St. Luke xxiv. 26). And with the certainty of suffering came also the certainty of the triumph beyond (Heb. xii. 2).

2. *In Relation to His Disciples.*—Though Jesus spoke to them often after this about the Cross, we know that they did not understand. But afterwards, looking back, they remembered (St. John xvi. 4). The words of Jesus were a threefold appeal. (1) *An appeal for loyalty.* They had just pledged themselves to His service; would they still hold to their pledge when they knew what lay before Him? How nobly they stood the test! (2) *An appeal for faith.* When they saw His words being fulfilled they would remember that He had told them that there was a divine necessity for it all. Their faith might falter for a moment under the supreme test of the crucifixion, but the almost unconscious influence of His words would help them to understand. (3) *An appeal for sympathy.* As the shadows darkened Jesus wanted to be assured that He could rely on the sympathy of the little company of friends whom He had gathered around Him (St. Matt. xxvi. 38). He could face the issue alone, if need be (St. John xvi. 32), but it belonged to the completeness of His humanity to find strength in the

sympathy of those whom He loved. They, too, would be called to suffer; and sympathy with the sufferings of Jesus would prepare them for following in His steps.

XXXVII.—THE OFFENCE OF THE CROSS

“Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him.”—ST. MARK viii. 32.

JESUS had just commended St. Peter and recognized his position as the leader of the apostolic band (St. Matt. xvi. 17-19). It is at such times as these that the disciple most needs to be watchful. As on another occasion (St. Luke xxii. 31), Satan was lying in wait to mislead. It was immediately after His baptism that Jesus was “driven” into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil (St. Mark i. 12).

1. *The Disciple's Rebuke of the Master.*—The idea of a suffering Messiah was one that St. Peter found it hard to accept. He drew Jesus aside (the word implies something like condescension) to remonstrate with Him. It was a loving, but a presumptuous, act. Love that has not learnt to understand may hinder where it wants to help. When the path of duty leads, for those we love, by the way of suffering, our natural impulse is to dissuade. It is interesting to notice how prominent, in St. Peter's speeches in Acts, and in his Epistle, is the thought of the necessity of the Cross. He had learnt to recognize that suffering must not be evaded, since “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example” (1 St. Pet. ii. 21).

2. *The Master's Rebuke of the Disciple.*—Jesus turned round, so as to face the disciples, with St. Peter behind Him, and used the same words that He used at the Temptation (St. Matt. iv. 10). For St. Peter had voiced the proposal of the tempter, to win the kingdom by some other way than the way of the Cross. We may paraphrase our Lord's words, “You are taking a merely human view, and forgetting that our lives are in God's hands.” The powers of evil will use human affection to turn men from the path of duty. May we not believe that Jesus felt in His human soul the natural shrinking from degradation and suffering that

made St. Peter's rebuke a temptation? But the temptation awakened no response, because He knew that it was the Father's will that so it should be (St. John xviii. 11). Neither morbid desire for suffering nor cowardly shrinking from it had any place in His mind. Only one thing mattered—to carry out the duty to the end. But He could not tolerate distrust in the inner circle of His disciples.

XXXVIII.—THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR DISCIPLESHIP

“Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”—ST. MARK viii. 34.

THE prediction of His sufferings had been spoken by Jesus only to His disciples, but now He called together the people who had gathered round, and told them the conditions on which they might be enrolled among His followers. It was no easy service that He invited them to accept. He would not have men follow Him without counting the cost. So He tells them of the three qualifications for discipleship.

1. *Discipleship Begins with Self-forgetfulness.*—They must refuse to know themselves (see the same word in St. Luke xii. 9; xxii. 34). What does self-denial mean? It means that our lives must find their centre of gravity outside themselves, must become no longer autocentric but Christocentric (see Gal. ii. 20). Self-denial does not mean inflicting small inconveniences on ourselves, but recognizing the absolute claim of Jesus Christ on our whole selves. It means keeping nothing back.

2. *The Disciple must “take up his cross.”*—It is difficult for us to feel quite what these words would mean to those to whom they were first spoken. They called men to face ignominy and suffering as a necessary condition of discipleship. It was as though Jesus had said, “I promise you, not honour, but disgrace; not victory, but the gallows.” It is because we do not enter into the fulness of their meaning that we miss the note of heroism that belongs to the call of Jesus.

3. The picture of the Church as a long procession of criminals carrying their crosses must have seemed strangely unattractive. But when Jesus placed Himself at the head of the procession the meaning became clear. The Master and His disciples were to share the same task and to endure the same sufferings. There could be no fellowship unless they were ready to share the fortunes of their leader, to risk everything in His service. We remember Garibaldi's often quoted proclamation after the fall of Rome, when he promised his followers "hunger, thirst, and vigil" but "never terms with the enemy." The heroism that faces death with self-forgotten courage needs one thing more to make it complete—the consecration of its sacrifice in the following of Christ.

XXXIX.—THE VALUE OF LIFE

"What shall a man give in exchange for his life?"—ST. MARK viii. 37.

THE word used here for "life" (*psuche*) means either the higher faculties of thought and emotion (the soul) by which man is distinguished from the animal world, or the life that these higher faculties enable us to live—the "psychic" life, as distinguished from the "pneumatic" or spiritual life. About this psychic part of our being Jesus told His disciples three things in these verses.

1. *It Cannot be Hoarded.*—Our powers of thought and will are given us for use. It is possible to be an intellectual miser, eager to accumulate "psychic" wealth. But life is enriched by what it gives, and impoverished by what it tries to keep to itself. The man who spends his life for Christ's sake and the Gospel's is enriching his own soul in the act of giving. Love cannot hoard its possessions; the scholar, the artist, the poet, hold their gifts in trust for the world.

2. *It Cannot be Bartered.*—Even if a man could gain the whole world at the price of the life of the soul, bad would be his bargain. Perhaps Jesus was thinking of the Temptation (St. Matt. iv. 8). The only poverty that really matters is poverty of the soul, and it was because material wealth tends to foster this that Jesus warned His disciples of the

danger of riches (St. Luke xviii. 24). Material wealth is only of value in so far as it ministers to fellowship and spiritual well-being (St. Luke xvi. 9). The best things of life are the things that cannot be sold; as soon as we offer them for sale they vanish. That was the lesson that King Lear had to learn in the school of suffering.

3. *It Cannot be Bought.*—"What price will a man pay for his soul?" The difference between human life, with its capacity for thought and feeling and moral progress, and the life of the animal world, is immeasurable. Before a man can share the divine life he must learn to value the human life that he has already. If he cannot buy the right to be a man, how much less can he buy the right to be a son of God. The words of Jesus are an appeal for a right estimate of values. The body must be the servant of the soul if the soul is to be the servant of the spirit.

XL.—THE REPROACH OF THE CROSS

"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me and of My words . . ."
—ST. MARK viii. 38.

JESUS was still thinking of the Cross, and He knew that in asking His followers to glory in the Cross (Gal. vi. 14) He was asking no easy thing. Yet the disciple who desires to share in the glory must be willing to share in the suffering (Rom. viii. 17). Why should men be ashamed of the Cross?

1. *The Cross was a Challenge to Human Ideas of Power.*—Men are often ashamed of weakness, of the apparent helplessness that can only meet oppression and wrong with patient endurance. The strong man will never lack followers, for power attracts men. But the Cross means the victory of weakness (2 Cor. xiii. 4); it teaches that to endure patiently may be a greater thing than to hit back successfully.

2. *The Cross was a Challenge to Human Ideas of Success.*—It was a stumbling-block to the Jew (1 Cor. i. 23) because it spoke not of a victorious Messiah, but of what seemed like a supreme failure. Only faith could see, beyond the failure, the victory that came through the Cross. Was

it strange that men should be tempted to be ashamed of a Master who predicted for Himself a shameful death? If He could not save Himself, how could He save the world? But the disciple who believed that the Son of Man was coming in the glory of His Father saw the way of the Cross as the way to victory, and, like his Lord, "despised the shame" (Heb. xii. 2).

3. *The Cross was a Challenge to Human Reason.*—It was foolishness to the Greek, because it spoke of a salvation, not attained by human wisdom, but conferred on the undeserving by the grace of God. It presented a condemned criminal as the saviour of the world, and invited the poorest and most ignorant to enter into His kingdom by making His Cross their own (Gal. ii. 20).

4. *The Offence of the Cross has not ceased.*—Carlyle preached the cult of the strong man; Nietzsche taught the ideal of the superman, whose god is success; modern rationalism regards redemption through sacrifice as an outworn superstition, and teaches men to believe that they can save themselves. We still need the warning of Jesus against being ashamed of Him.

XLI.—THE TRANSFIGURATION

"He was transfigured before them."—ST. MARK ix. 2.

THE transfiguration is closely connected with the first definite prediction by Jesus of His death. The week that intervened would give time for the new idea to sink into the minds of the disciples, and then the inner circle of the disciples were permitted to see their Master in a new aspect. It is noteworthy that we never hear of our Lord praying with His disciples; His habit was to withdraw from them to pray. For His prayer meant an intimacy of communion into which no human life could enter. But on this one occasion they were allowed to see Him at prayer, and their eyes were opened to the realities of a spiritual world that was normally invisible.

1. As Moses returned from communion with God with an unearthly brightness on his face, so the form of Jesus

was enfolded in a halo of light as He prayed. The body of His humiliation was, for a little while, changed into the body of glory (Phil. iii. 21), as it was destined to be changed permanently at the resurrection. In the act of prayer His humanity passed into the spiritual world that was its home. They saw, for a moment, a life that lay beyond the reach of death.

2. Beside Him the law and the prophets stood revealed in the person of their representatives. St. Luke tells us that they were speaking of "His exodus, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." So the disciples learnt that the saints of the Old Dispensation, like the angels (1 St. Pet. i. 12), were sharers in the great secret that has so recently been revealed to them. The death of which He had spoken had seemed to them a mere outrage; now they saw how much deeper and vaster were the issues involved.

3. St. Peter's impulsive proposal seemed to link our Lord and His two visitors in one group, but the voice from the cloud told them of the uniqueness of His claim. Moses and Elijah were honoured servants in the household of God (Heb. iii. 3), but the beloved Son had an honour that they could not share. St. Peter had already confessed that Jesus was greater than the prophets; now the confession was confirmed from above. He who "spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets" had now spoken unto men by One who was His Son (Heb. i. 1).

XLII.—AN UNANSWERED PETITION

"Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles."—ST. MARK ix. 5.

As before (St. Mark viii. 32), St. Peter's impetuous character makes him the mouthpiece of the rest. Apparently his impulsive utterance broke the spell, and a cloud came down on the mountain. His first confused impulse was one of thankfulness. His astonishment did not now find expression in the prayer, "Depart from me" (St. Luke v. 8). And with this feeling of thankfulness there mingled the desire to escape, for a time at least, from the world of common things. Perhaps he was thinking of the Feast of

the Tabernacles, the great annual holiday that followed on the ingathering of the harvest, when the people made for themselves booths or "tabernacles." It has been suggested that the thought was vaguely present in the mind of the apostle that Jesus might be induced to stay on the mountain and so avoid the death of which He had spoken. At least, his request expresses the desire to prolong the experience by showing honour to Jesus and His guests.

1. To most Christian men there comes at times a special consciousness of the reality of spiritual things. Especially, perhaps, at Holy Communion, we share in some degree St. Paul's experience (2 Cor. xii. 4). And the thankful consciousness that "it is good for us to be here" may best find expression in an adoration that forgets itself that it may think only of the spiritual world on the threshold of which we are permitted to stand.

2. Spiritual exaltation has its dangers (see 2 Cor. xii. 7). Like Sir Percival in Tennyson's *Holy Grail*, we may be unfitted for the practical service of life. It is not good for us to stay too long on the mountain, for in the valley below our fellow-disciples are facing human need, and require our help. So, as in the medieval legend, we must leave the vision of Christ to serve the poor at the convent gate. Only when the ingathering is complete can we build our booths and share the gladness of the message, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men" (Rev. xxi. 3). Mysticism may be dangerous unless it is associated with a great desire for service. If we set up our booths on the mountain we shall find that they are empty, for the Master has gone down to serve and suffer for men; and we shall find Him again in "the trivial round, the common task."

XLIII.—THE REJECTED FORERUNNER

"Elias is indeed come, and they have done to him whatsoever they listed."—ST. MARK ix. 13.

THE appearance of Elijah on the mountain would naturally turn the thoughts of the disciples to the tradition based on Malachi iv. 5, that Elijah would appear again before the

coming of the Messiah. How could this prediction be reconciled with what they had heard about the death of Jesus? He pointed out to them that both were predicted by the prophets.

1. *Elijah had Come.*—Not the actual Elijah, but one “in the spirit and power of Elijah,” with the same call to repentance. In pointing to St. John the Baptist as the promised Elijah, Jesus was pointing to Himself as the Christ for whom St. John had come to prepare. All the three disciples to whom He spoke had probably been disciples of St. John before they attached themselves to Jesus (St. John i. 37).

2. *He had Come Unrecognized.*—The scribes had taught the people to look for a literal reappearance of Elijah, and so they missed the real meaning of the mission of St. John the Baptist. God’s purpose in history does not fulfil itself automatically; it depends on human recognition and co-operation. The men who failed to recognize St. John as the promised Elijah failed to recognize Jesus as the promised Christ, and so the “restoration of all things” is still delayed. It will only come when men obey the call to repentance which St. John the Baptist gave, and accept the authority of Jesus Christ.

3. *He had Suffered.*—It was this that Jesus wanted His disciples to recognize. The fate of St. John the Baptist was an earnest of what lay before Him. Their hopes of easy triumph needed to be discouraged, lest they should lead to a dangerous despondency when the hour of the Cross came. The original Elijah had suffered for the truth’s sake; and his successor faced severer suffering in defence of righteousness. The suffering of the Christ was no isolated thing; it was the fulfilment of an age-long process. Moral victories are always won by men who are prepared to suffer. To be near Christ is to be near the fire. Yet the curse foretold by the prophet (Mal. iv. 6) fell on the nation that refused “Elijah’s” call to reconciliation.

XLIV.—THE PATIENCE OF JESUS

"O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?"—ST. MARK ix. 19.

JESUS must have been keenly conscious of the changed atmosphere as He came down from the Mount of Transfiguration to find failure, disappointment, and triumphant hostility. Though the great Teacher bore patiently with the slowness of His scholars, yet sometimes a kind of weariness shows itself in His remonstrances with them for their lack of faith. He knew that He must be with them till they grew strong enough to trust Him, and that the "exodus" of which He had been speaking on the mountain could not be consummated till then. What was it that He found waiting for Him?

1. *An Atmosphere of Controversy.*—We may be quite certain that the controversies forced upon Him by the scribes were distasteful to Him. No good man loves controversy, and to come straight from communion with God into the atmosphere of strife and cavilling is peculiarly trying. For the scribes were not honest inquirers, open to conviction. Are not our controversies still distasteful to Him? (2 Tim. ii. 24). Is it not generally when we have lost the sense of His presence that we fall to questionings with the scribes?

2. *An Atmosphere of Impotence.*—In His Name the disciples had cast out demons, but in face of this peculiarly obstinate case of possession their faith had failed. Their natural leaders had withdrawn with the Master, and their strength seemed to have deserted them. His word to them afterwards seems to imply that they had forgotten to pray; and, trying to act on their own resources, had failed. Faith means courage based on dependence. It is not in our own name, but in His, that we cast out devils.

3. *An Atmosphere of Disappointment.*—There is something very touching in the way in which the crowd and the father of the child turned to Jesus. The Church had failed, but they felt that Jesus would not fail. Can we not feel the same atmosphere to-day? The demons of hate and selfishness and love have not been cast out, and can we say that

the charge that the Church has failed is wholly unjust? Yet men have not lost their faith in Jesus. If they could recognize Him, would they not still be greatly amazed, and running to Him, salute Him? He never disappoints those who appeal to Him.

XLV.—THE DEMONIAK BOY

"The father of the child cried out and said with tears, Lord, I believe."—*ST. MARK ix. 24.*

THE disciples had failed, and so Jesus gave them an object-lesson in the true method of dealing with human need. The boy, racked by a paroxysm of epilepsy, was incapable of responding to any words of Jesus. As in the case of the woman of chapter vii. 25, it is the father's faith on which the healing depends (ch. ii. 4).

1. Jesus invites the father to tell the whole sad story. The first step towards confidence was to unburden his grief. We may hide our sorrows from men, but He would have us tell Him all the truth (ch. v. 23). The disciples had not yet learned the secret of the sympathy that could evoke confidence—the "heart at leisure from itself, to soothe and sympathize." He who would help other men must first learn how to win their confidence.

2. Jesus' next step was to strengthen the faith of the father. The failure of the disciples had left in his mind a doubt whether any cure was possible. Where they had failed, was it certain that the Master could succeed? Even so, men are still led to doubt the power of Jesus by the failures of His disciples. The reply of the father was a protest and a prayer—a beautiful blend of confidence and humility. Faith is truest when it is most conscious of its own imperfection (*St. Luke xvii. 5*).

3. Jesus had created the atmosphere in which His healing power could work (*St. Mark vi. 5*); so now He turned to the boy. We note two stages in the miracle. First, evil must be cast out. It is a fierce struggle; the child is torn and exhausted before the demon is driven out. Then Jesus took the apparently dead child by the hand, and new life

flows into him at His touch. Salvation is a twofold process—a death unto sin and a new life unto righteousness. It is not enough to cast out evil from human hearts; the new life must come in to raise men up (see St. Luke xi. 24). Jewish exorcists could cast out demons (St. Luke xi. 19), but they could not lift men up into the new life over which evil things could not reassert their power. Renunciation must be followed by faith and obedience—the baptism that cleanses by the gift of the Spirit that gives life. And it is the same Christ who acts through both.

XLVI.—THE PENALTY OF TIMIDITY

“They understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask Him.”—
ST. MARK ix. 32.

DURING this journey through Galilee Jesus spoke habitually of His approaching death. He wished to leave His disciples under no illusions as to what lay before Him and them. But His warnings seemed to break against the slow-heartedness of which He afterwards complained (St. Luke xxiv. 25).

1. *The First Result of His Teaching was Perplexity.*—They had formed their own idea of how the kingdom would come, and they could not fit His predictions into the framework that their hopes had constructed. A little later we find them disputing as to who should occupy the chief places in the kingdom, the coming of which they expected (Acts i. 6). It is always difficult to reconsider our preconceived ideas about things. Was it partly this of which Jesus was thinking when He set a little child in the midst of them?

2. *On Perplexity followed Fear.*—Jesus always encouraged His disciples to ask questions (St. John xvi. 19). A desire to know is the necessary condition of all revelation. This desire for a fuller knowledge may be hindered by preconceived ideas; or it may be hindered by fear. A man who is willing to live in illusions, and is afraid to face the stern facts of life, will not attain to the freedom that comes from the knowledge of the truth. The courage of

Jesus enabled Him to face with clear-eyed consciousness all that lay before Him.

3. *Two Results followed.*—A barrier of reserve grew up between Jesus and His disciples. He walked less with them; more before them (St. Mark x. 32). They could not sympathize with a burden that they did not understand, and He was obliged to bear it alone. And they were not prepared, as He wanted them to be, for the shock of His death and the wonder of His resurrection. Though their incredulity was overruled for the more confirmation of the Gospel, it was no part of His original purpose that they should be scattered every man to his own and should leave Him alone. Dulness of understanding may serve the purpose of God, but if He does not need our wisdom, still less does He need our ignorance. His question to us still is, "How is it that ye do not understand?"

XLVII.—"THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM"

"He took a little child, and set him in the midst of them."—**St. MARK ix. 36.**

THE house to which Jesus returned at Capernaum may have been St. Peter's house, which He seems to have used as His headquarters (see ch. i. 29). If so, the little child may have been St. Peter's. The episode is clearly pictured by St. Mark. Disputes as to who should be the greatest would naturally arise in a company of men who were looking forward to the establishment of a kingdom. Do they not constantly arise in our Church life of to-day? By sitting down and calling the twelve to Him, Jesus showed His intention of giving a decisive verdict on their claims. What was the verdict?

1. *The Chastening of Ambition.*—"The first shall be last." "He that exalteth himself shall be abased." The disciple who wants to be first has two lessons to learn: (1) A lesson of humility. So he must "begin with shame to take the lowest room" (St. Luke xiv. 9). Self-assertiveness is always wrong (2 Cor. x. 18); the more circumstances place a man in a position of prominence, the more he needs

to cultivate the grace of humility. (2) A lesson of service. The man who wants to be chief must become the servant (*diaconos*) of all.

2. *The Reward of Service.*—In the little child, Jesus found an illustration of both these lessons. First, the child in the midst as a lesson of humility. It was as though Jesus had said: "This child has no claim to the place of honour except that I have placed him there. The central place is not yours to demand but Mine to bestow." Then the child in His arms as a lesson of service. It was as though He had said: "Learn to identify yourselves with simple things, to reverence the weak, to shelter the helpless." The world's way to honour is to serve the influential and great; but Christ's way to honour was to serve the unimportant and simple, for in receiving them we receive Him (we remember the story of St. Christopher), and in receiving Him we receive the whole Godhead. Who is the greatest in the kingdom? He who is in the closest contact with the King. And who is he? The man who gives his strength to the service of the weak, his wisdom to the service of the ignorant, his wealth to the service of the needy.

XLVIII.—THE SMOKING FLAX

"He that is not against us is on our part."—ST. MARK ix. 40.

ST. MARK has grouped together a series of warnings against discouraging immature discipleship—quenching the smoking flax (Isa. xlii. 3). In a man's attitude towards the person of Jesus Christ neutrality is antagonism (St. Matt. xii. 30), but the question at issue here is the attitude of a man who is, in some measure at least, on Christ's side, towards the organized Christian society.

1. The conscience of St. John had been stirred by what Jesus had said, so he took the right course in "owning up" to what he had done. Jesus did not treat what was, at most, an error of judgment as He treated a lack of moral insight (see St. Luke ix. 55). The incident is an interesting illustration of St. John's vehement character (St. Mark iii. 17), and also of his desire not to wrong one of "these little ones."

2. The attitude of the disciples towards the man was not unnatural. Who had given this man the right to use the Master's name? Their authority to cast out demons had been conferred by Him (St. Mark iii. 15). (For a similar example of the unauthorized use of the Name, see Acts xix. 13.) In the language of a later time, we might say that the man recognized the power of Jesus, but would not join the Church. So the disciples regarded him as what Trade Unionists would call a "blackleg," who must be suppressed.

3. Jesus did not tell His disciples that it did not matter whether the man followed them (or, according to St. Luke, "followed with them") or not. He told them two things: (1) Any recognition of their Master ought to be welcomed. (For a remarkable example, see Phil. i. 18.) They must not regard the Name as a monopoly the infringement of which they had the right to resent. (2) Isolated discipleship is always a dangerous condition. The man would not quickly (not "lightly," as in A.V.) speak evil of Jesus; but, cut off from the fellowship of other disciples, his loyalty to the Name might gradually decrease. The only security against the danger was the constant companionship of Jesus. Did Jesus mean that a kindlier attitude on the part of the disciples might have won the man to fuller identification of himself with the cause? At all events, His words are a warning against the partisan spirit that is unwilling to recognize the good that lies outside the frontiers of our own society.

XLIX.—SELF-LIMITATION

"If thy hand offend thee, cut it off."—ST. MARK ix. 43.

WITH the saying about offending these little ones St. Mark associates another saying of Jesus about offences. He was speaking in parables; and the Church has always condemned such literal interpretations as that of Origen, who mutilated himself as a protection against temptation.

1. *All Experience is not Legitimate Experience.*—In this dangerous world we cannot safely indulge every impulse of our nature. There is the tree in the garden of which we

must not eat; the inexpedient thing into the power of which we may fall (1 Cor. vi. 12). Abstinence is sometimes a clear Christian duty. In the story of the first "offence" the foot that went, the eye that desired, and the hand that took, all played their part.

2. *Each Life has its own Special Dangers.*—What is safe for one man may be perilous for another. We may cause ourselves to stumble by the things that we do (the hand), or through the places to which we go (the foot), or through the things that we look upon (the eye). So each man must learn to recognize what part of his nature is hindering his progress in the Christian life. Renunciation means willingness to surrender even part of our own being rather than fail in following Jesus.

3. *Destruction or Restoration.*—"The gehenna of fire" was the Valley of Hinnom, where the rubbish of the city was carried out to be burned, and where the fires were always burning. So it becomes the symbol of the ruin which overtakes a soul that has chosen self-indulgence rather than self-discipline. Again our Lord is speaking in parables, but the parable is meant to suggest a terrible reality. Self-realization that sets at naught the moral law ends in self-destruction. And may we not believe that those who enter into life maimed for the kingdom of heaven's sake, find there the same healing power that on earth gave back sight to the blind and power to the withered hand, and made the lame man leap for joy? We renounce in order to achieve. Even Jesus entered into fulness of life only by "emptying" Himself (Phil. ii. 7). The tree of life in the garden was guarded against those who had sinned; but in the Paradise of God its leaves are for the healing of the nations.

L.—SALT

"Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another."—ST. MARK ix. 50.

THE healing and preserving power of salt makes it a natural symbol of the grace of God. (For the reference to the sacrificial use of salt, which is not in the original text,

see Lev. ii. 13; Num. xviii. 19). St. Mark has linked together three sayings of Jesus about salt :

1. The expression "salted with fire" is explained by the fact that salt and fire both have purifying power. Fire will destroy refuse, but it will purify gold. The words suggest that the purifying of human character is no easy, painless process. The salt that heals the raw flesh will make it smart. We must not shrink from the suffering that is God's antiseptic (1 St. Pet. i. 7; iv. 12; St. Jas. i. 2). There is an apocryphal saying of Jesus, "He that is near Me is near the fire."

2. The second saying needs the addition of St. Matthew v. 13. Our Lord thought of human society as sick and in danger of corruption, and He wanted His disciples to recognize that every Christian man must be like salt saving the world from putrefaction. Ten righteous men might have saved Sodom from destruction (Gen. xviii. 32). The desire for holiness is sometimes represented as a selfish desire for personal salvation; but real holiness, like salt, spreads its influence all round, counteracting the influence of evil. The men and women who are saving society are not the noisy demagogues or officious meddlers (1 St. Pet. iv. 15), but the men and women who are quietly living out the Christian life.

3. But if a man is to exercise this purifying influence he must "have salt in himself"—we can give to others only what we have received. Among the Arabs salt is the symbol of friendship, and is offered to their guest in token of welcome. Was Jesus thinking of this when He connected together the idea of salt and the idea of fellowship? The disciples had been contending as to who should be the greatest, so He said to them, The same salt (the Holy Spirit) is preserving all your lives; there is enough for you all; you need not contend for superiority. "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (1 Cor. iv. 7).

LI.—CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

“What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”
—St. MARK x. 9.

ON the other side of the Jordan Jesus resumed, for a little while, His former habit of public teaching, with its old accompaniment of controversy with the Pharisees. Their question about marriage and divorce was an attempt to discredit His teaching by showing that it was stricter than that of Moses, and perhaps to involve Him with Herod, as St. John the Baptist had been involved (ch. vi. 18). In reply, Jesus deals with marriage in three aspects:

1. *Religious*.—Marriage is not merely a social custom; its roots lie in the original constitution of the world as it came from the hand of God. God made man and woman for fellowship; and the normal expression of that fellowship is in married life. Jesus gave no encouragement to the idea of the inferiority of the married state as compared with celibacy, though He recognized that for individuals marriage might not be possible consistently with duty to their special vocation (St. Matt. xix. 12).

2. *Social*.—Marriage is the creation of a new group within the social order. The fact that the new obligation superseded the older duty that a man owed to his parents implies that the new relation was not less permanent and binding than the old. Divorce complicates the whole system of social relationships. It makes the family a temporary instead of a permanent institution.

3. *Physical*.—Jesus spoke with no false shame of the physical side of marriage. He founded His assertion of the indissoluble character of marriage on the fact that marriage, once consummated, involved a physical relationship that could not be set aside (1 Cor. vii. 4). Marriage is sacramental because it expresses a spiritual fact through physical acts.

4. To the disciples our Lord explained even more clearly that the remarriage of divorced persons was no real marriage. As reported by St. Mark, His words do not include the qualification recorded in St. Matthew v. 32.

Whatever law the State may adopt, the Church cannot set aside the words of Jesus, or treat the marriage of Christian persons as a contract terminable on any other ground than unfaithfulness.

LII.—JESUS AND THE CHILDREN

“They brought young children to Him, that He should touch them.”
—ST. MARK x. 13.

IT was generally the crippled and diseased who came to Jesus that He might touch them; but the same touch that brought healing to them could reach out to bless the lives of children. It is easy to understand how the disciples would have regarded the desire of the mothers to win for their children the touch of Jesus as a mere superstition. But He rebuked them, as He would rebuke us still for our habit of despising as superstitious the forms of devotion in which simple-minded men try to express their love to Him. We may learn from this incident:

1. *That the Kingdom is not only for the “wise and prudent”* (St. Matt. xi. 25).—There is a place in it for the simple and ignorant (1 Cor. i. 27). It is the touch of Jesus that makes us fit to enter. They who can bring nothing of their own are not less welcome than those who have much to bring.

2. *That the Kingdom is not only for the mature—for those who have reached “years of discretion.”*—Jesus had already shown how the faith of a parent availed to bring blessing on a child (ch. v. 22; vii. 25; ix. 23), and now He taught the same lesson again. If the children could not consciously draw near to Him, they could not consciously turn away. We are only beginning to discover how deeply our lives are affected by influences that are brought to bear on us before the stage of conscious thought.

3. *That the Kingdom is not only for the weary and sorrowful.*—He came to call sinners to repentance, to restore hope to lives that had failed; but He loved the unspoiled lives that were brought to Him. We need not wait till we have fed the swine in the far country before

we come to our Father's house. "Just as I am, young, strong, and free, Lord of my life, I come." It was a true instinct that led the early Church to feel that baptism must not be denied to little children, whose parents brought them that in that sacrament Jesus might touch them and claim them as His own. For salvation is always the act of God, and we can only respond to what He has already done.

LIII.—THE WAY TO THE KINGDOM

"Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."—ST. MARK x. 15.

THE kingdom is conceived in two aspects—as something we receive, and as something we enter. The word used here for "receive" implies an act of welcome on our part (*cf.* ch. ix. 37). We welcome the coming of the kingdom into our lives, and when the kingdom has entered into us we enter into the kingdom. Natural and spiritual life are subject to the same conditions.

1. *Birth*.—We "receive the kingdom" by being born anew (St. John iii. 3). Baptism is the outward and visible sign of a new birth (Rom. vi. 4). Conversion (St. Matt. xviii. 3) is an act of God, but it only becomes effective when we respond to it. It is the constant renewal of our regeneration. So every act of communion is associated with the intention to lead a new life.

2. *Dependence*.—The special characteristic of a new-born babe (1 St. Pet. ii. 2) is dependence. And the kingdom is offered, not to those who have much to give, but to those who are conscious of the greatness of their need (St. Matt. ix. 12). The meekness that is commended in St. Matthew v. 5 is trustful dependence. The meek "inherit the land"; the poor and needy (those who feel their dependence) receive the kingdom. The universal kingdom is founded on a universal fact—the fact of man's dependence upon God. If the rich are sent empty away, it is only that they may learn their need, and come again in a childlike spirit of dependence.

3. *Growth*.—We “receive the kingdom,” not in its full maturity, but as a seed that is to grow (1 St. Pet. ii. 2). We must leave behind the ignorance and immaturity of childhood (1 Cor. xiv. 20; Heb. v. 13), while keeping its humility and friendliness. Childhood is the age of unrealized possibilities, and we are born into the kingdom that we may grow gradually like the King (Eph. iv. 15). As children dream of what they will do when they are grown up, so we are to learn to look forward (Phil. iii. 13), for “the best is still to be” in the kingdom of God. The childlike spirit is the spirit of expectation.

LIV.—THE GOODNESS OF GOD

“There is none good but one, that is, God.”—ST. MARK x. 18.

JESUS did not resent the courteous salutation of the young ruler, but He knew (as appeared in the conversation that followed) that he had not thought deeply enough about the meaning of good. We are all prone to use words without thinking out their meaning. But words are sacraments—outward expressions of spiritual realities. An educated man is a man who has learnt to use words with a due regard to their meaning.

1. *God, the Standard of all Goodness*.—The gods of the heathen were stronger, but not better, than their worshippers, and morality became separated from religion. It was only the Jewish religion that held to the truth of the holiness of God. God is to be loved, not because He is omnipotent, but because He is perfect goodness. The man who does not love God has not learnt the attractiveness of goodness.

2. *God, the Author of all Goodness*.—Goodness is not a human achievement (as the young ruler thought), but a divine gift—it “cometh down from above” (St. Jas. i. 17). When Jesus Christ called God “the Father,” He taught men to think of Him as the giver of all good. The “good things” of St. Matthew vii. 11 are not only material blessings, but most of all (as in St. Luke’s version of the saying) the Holy Spirit, whose fruit is goodness (Gal. v. 22).

3. *God, the Goal of all Goodness.*—Eternal life is not merely perpetual existence; it is fellowship with God (St. John xvii. 3). And only good can have fellowship with Him. The man who loves wealth more than holiness—who sets *goods* above *good*—cannot inherit the kingdom of God. It is not what we have, but what we are, that qualifies us for admission into that kingdom. The power and wisdom of God are beyond our reach, but He invites us to share His goodness—on one condition, that we desire goodness more than anything else in the world.

The words of Jesus seemed to put goodness above human reach; but He came to bring the goodness of God into the world of men; to make human goodness possible by uniting men with Himself.

LV.—ONE THING

“One thing thou lackest.”—ST. MARK X. 21.

How often it happens that lives are held in bondage by some one “besetting sin.” Just one effort might set a man free, yet it is just that one effort that he is incapable of making.

“O, the little more, and how much it is !
And the little less, and what worlds away !”

In our Lord’s enumeration of the commandments the tenth is omitted. To the rest the young man could honestly reply that he had tried to keep them. Then Jesus turns to the one commandment that he had not tried to keep. Because He loved him, He gave him a hard thing to do, for real love is not mere indulgence. The man whom Jesus loves must expect to be called to endure hardness. It was a threefold call.

1. *A Call to Renunciation.*—The Christian life begins with renunciation (Phil. iii. 8). He who would have the pearl of great price must be prepared to sell all that he has. Every Christian man is not called to dispossess himself of all his property, but he is called to hold worldly possessions of little worth as compared with the things of

the spirit. That is what Jesus meant by being "poor in spirit" (St. Matt. v. 3).

2. *A Call to Benevolence.*—The young man is not to go away and squander his goods. He is to carry out the golden rule of loving his neighbour as himself. He had found the life of getting unsatisfying; now he is to try the life of giving. As a man of high social rank, he had been accustomed to give and receive hospitality (St. Luke xiv. 12); now he was to give to those who could not repay (St. Luke vi. 35).

3. *A Call to Consecration.*—"Come, follow Me." It was as though Jesus had said, "I do not want your money; I only want you." The young ruler was invited to "take up his cross"—to exchange a life of comfort for one of danger and hardship. He went away, but he went away sorrowful, seeing the better and choosing the worse. We should like to believe the early tradition that the young man was St. Barnabas, who afterwards sold all that he had that he might be free to follow (Acts. iv. 36).

LVI.—HARD TO ENTER

"Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!"—ST. MARK x. 24.

ACCORDING to a well-attested reading, the actual words of Jesus were: "Children, how hard it is to enter into the kingdom of God"—hard, not only for the rich, but for all. There is a wistful sadness and tenderness in the words. In the verses that follow Jesus speaks of three hindrances:

1. *The Over-valuation of Material Things.*—A man weighed down with possessions suggests to our Lord a laden camel. The over-valuation of material things is one of the most marked characteristics of modern life, and it poisons social and economic relationships. We need a new Franciscan movement to demonstrate the happiness of poverty. The adoption of a simple standard of life is a Christian duty; for the world will not believe in the supreme value of spiritual things while Christian men are

putting their best energies into the accumulation of material wealth.

2. *There is the Opposite Danger.*—A man burdened with material possessions may despair of ever attaining the blessed life, till at last he learns to acquiesce, like a patient camel, in his destiny. The parable is meant to bring out the impossibility of attainment, in our own aided strength. It is only when we remember that with God all things are possible that we are encouraged to make the effort. No man—rich or poor—can enter the kingdom apart from the help of God; and no man need despair of entering, since God is waiting to help all who ask.

3. *There is yet Another Danger.*—Renunciation the motive for which is the hope of an ampler recompense may disqualify a man for entry into the kingdom. So Jesus told St. Peter that sacrifice made “for My sake and the Gospel’s” would bring large recompense, but human rules of precedence would be reversed in the kingdom—“the last should be first” (see St. Mark xii. 43). It is not the amount, but the motive, of our giving that matters. If we give in order to be “repaid a thousandfold,” our giving is of little worth. Love receives an hundredfold for its giving just because it asks for nothing but the right to give.

LVII.—FELLOWSHIP WITH THE KING

“Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”—ST. MARK x. 38.

IF, as seems probable, Salome was the sister of the Virgin Mary, and James and John cousins of our Lord, according to the flesh, their desire to be assured of the place of honour in the kingdom was not unnatural. The form in which the request was made—“Give us whatsoever we shall ask”—was not quite “straight.”

1. In recognizing the meaner side of the petition, we are in danger of missing its more heroic aspect. Jesus had been speaking of His approaching death, and the fact that the two disciples (and their mother—St. Matt. xx. 20) chose

this moment to proffer their request showed, at least, a refusal to accept this as the end. If they asked for the highest places in the kingdom, they were prepared to pay the price.

2. "The cup" (St. Matt. xxvi. 39; St. John xviii. 11) and "the baptism" (St. Luke xii. 50) were words that Jesus used to describe the destiny that lay before Him. There is no reason to regard the reply of the two disciples—"We are able"—as mere presumption (*cf.* Phil. iv. 13). They might fail, like St. Peter (St. John xiii. 38), but they did not shrink from the challenge. So they were assured that they should have fellowship with Him. The cup and the baptism suggest the two sacraments in which we pledge ourselves to fellowship with Jesus Christ.

3. The closing words seem to be a warning against the idea that the status of men in the kingdom is a matter of arbitrary favouritism. Prepared places of honour are for prepared people. It is as though Jesus had said: "You must earn the right to high place in the kingdom by faithful following and humble service" (St. Luke xiv. 10). Prayer and effort must go together in the Christian life. The disciples gradually learnt that God is "no respecter of persons" (Acts x. 34; 1 St. Pet. i. 17); that the prize is for "him that overcometh" (Rev. iii. 21). The highest place in the kingdom is for those who are most like the King. When Jesus gave the cup to His disciples, with the words "Drink ye all of this," He told them of the day when He would drink with them again in His Father's kingdom (1 Cor. ix. 24). In that kingdom there is no room for contest for the highest places, for the honour of His servants is in service.

LVIII.—THE LAW OF THE KINGDOM

"The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."—ST. MARK x. 45.

THE demand of the two brothers, and the indignation of the rest, showed how little the disciples had understood the character of the kingdom into which they had been

admitted. So in these closing words Jesus explained that the law of the kingdom was service and sacrifice.

1. *Domination*.—In the kingdoms of this world greatness showed itself in a claim to be served. The idea that the ruler is the servant of his people is the outcome of the teaching of Jesus Christ. In the great oriental despotisms with which the Jews were familiar, the people were the chattels of their sovereign. Human ambition is often still a "will to power" rather than a desire to serve. Even in the Church the desire to be "lords over God's inheritance" soon became a danger (1 St. Pet. v. 3).

2. *Service*.—As a contrast, Jesus pointed to Himself. He asked for no honours that the world could give (St. John vi. 15), for He had taken upon Him "the form of a servant" (Phil. ii. 7). So at the last supper He accepted the menial office of washing His disciples' feet, a fact that St. Peter remembered (see 1 St. Pet. v. 5, where the full translation is "Gird yourself with the apron of humility to serve"). The only competition in the Christian Church should be as to who can serve most.

3. *Sacrifice*.—There is a sense in which the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is unique. He gave His life a ransom in a way that is impossible for any of the sons of men (Ps. xlix. 7). But here He is speaking of a kind of giving in which we are called to follow Him. The war has taught us how the idea of vicarious sacrifice is woven into the fabric of human life (1 St. John iii. 16). Every life laid down for others is a ransom. We may be called to lay down our lives (as St. James was—Acts xii. 2) in one great act of sacrifice; or we may be called to give them (as St. John was) in the constant and daily preference of the good of others over our own. Even Jesus gained the "name that is above every name" by becoming obedient unto the death of the Cross. And for the disciple, too, exaltation comes through sacrifice (St. Matt. xxiii. 12).

LIX.—THE LAST MIRACLE

“Immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.”
—St. MARK x. 52.

THIS is the last miracle recorded in St. Mark's Gospel. From this time our Lord's mind was concentrated on the great struggle that lay before Him, but one last deed of mercy closed the record of His acts of healing. There are some special features in the incident:

1. *The Persistence of the Appeal*.—The rebuke of those around him, and the apparent indifference of Jesus, only made him cry the louder. A man who is in earnest is not easily discouraged, and Jesus never resented the importunity of those who needed Him. The eagerness with which he cast away his garment shows the same determination to overcome every hindrance (*cf.* Heb. xii. 1). Real faith means vigorous activity as well as trustful confidence (St. Matt. xi. 12).

2. *The Attitude of the People*.—The “many” who rebuked him were probably those of the outskirts of the crowd, while those who went to call him were those who were nearest to Jesus—perhaps His disciples, who had heard their Master's “Be of good cheer” in their hour of need. It is still those on the outskirts who resent anything unconventional and disturbing; it is still those who are nearest to Jesus who are eager to bring the needy to Him.

3. *The Almost Hurried Answer to the Appeal*.—Just one question, and the blind received sight (contrast St. Mark viii. 23). One reason for this was probably the fact that Jesus was in the midst of a crowd, and had no time to draw the blind man aside. But there was probably a deeper reason. The journey on which such vast issues depended must not be interrupted, even for acts of healing. The call of a deeper need was now sounding in His ears. It was not isolated sufferers but the whole world whose need was pressing on His heart. He paused for a moment to grant the blind man's petition, and then moved on with His face steadfastly set towards Jerusalem. And Bartimæus followed with the rest. From the fact that St. Mark mentions

his name it has been conjectured that he was known as a member of the Church at the time when the Gospel was written (*cf.* ch. xv. 21).

LX.—A ROYAL REQUISITION

“The Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him back hither.”—*ST. MARK xi. 3 (R.V.)*.

THERE is no reason to presuppose supernatural knowledge in this commission of the disciples. It is more likely that our Lord had arranged with a friend at Bethany to hold a colt at His disposal, to be sent for when it was needed. Outside the little group that accompanied Him on His journeys, He must have had many friends who were ready to do any service for which He asked them. The incident shows us:

1. *The Poverty of Jesus*.—“For our sakes He became poor.” He was dependent on the kindness of others for even the simplest requirements—for a colt on which to ride, a boat from which to preach, an upper room in which to eat the Passover with His disciples. He “by whom all things were made” (*St. John i. 3; Heb. i. 2*) would not exercise His power to supply His own needs (*St. Matt. iv. 3*). He chose to share the life of dependence that poverty brings. In His kingdom great possessions were regarded as a danger rather than a blessing, and the King practised what He preached.

2. *The Authority of Jesus*.—Though it was a humble gift that He claimed, yet the claim was royal. The children of the kingdom must hold their possessions in trust for the King. The same voice that claimed a colt might claim life itself, and there must be no holding back. It is sometimes harder to meet a simple demand, a commonplace sacrifice, than to rise to some great act of self-surrender. It is often in little things that our religion breaks down, and we withhold what the Master needs.

3. *The Graciousness of Jesus*.—It is often by what he asks of them, more than by what he gives them, that men are bound to the service of a great leader. It is the consciousness that “the Lord hath need” of our gifts and

service that gives dignity and value to life. It was because He loved His disciples that He asked so much of them. According to the most probable reading, Jesus promised to return the colt as soon as it had served His purpose. The King would not act in careless disregard of the rights of His subjects. The gift that He claimed for His service would be given back with a new consecration. It was a lesson to the two disciples in the courtesy of a true King.

LXI.—THE CHALLENGE OF THE KING

“Blessed is the kingdom that cometh.”—ST. MARK xi. 10.

IN his account of the entry into Jerusalem St. Mark omits most of the details supplied by the other evangelists. He merely presents us with the picture of Jesus riding in, while the crowd sang the psalm that told of the coming of the kingdom. It was a scene of homely splendour. The peasant-King had no soldiers to guard Him, no royal robes or gems of price. The rough cloaks of the common people and branches “cut from the fields” carpeted the road.

1. *The Challenge of the Kingdom.*—Jesus deliberately set Himself to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah (Zech. ix. 9), who foretold the coming of a King, royal in his lowliness. As at the beginning of His ministry (St. Luke iv. 21), so now at the close He claimed to be the promised King. By doing so He threw out a challenge that His enemies were compelled to accept. Between Him and them compromise was no longer possible; the time had come when they must choose between acceptance and rejection, and He knew already what that choice would be. The religion of Jesus Christ is never without this note of challenge. It cannot purchase toleration at the cost of leaving the world alone.

2. *The Character of the Kingdom.*—Jesus showed what kind of kingdom it was that He came to establish. It was a kingdom that would exalt the humble and meek, that would welcome the offerings of the common people (Ps. lxxii. 12-14)—a kingdom, not of force, but of gentleness (St. John xviii. 36), not of conquest, but of sacrifice. There is no doubt that the crowd around Him

consisted chiefly of the Galilean peasants who knew Him already, and who at least once before had dreamed of making Him a King (St. John vi. 15). They did not know the full significance of what they did, but they welcomed the opportunity of proclaiming their devotion to Jesus. For the last time, He found Himself surrounded by the friends among whom He had lived and laboured. May we not believe that He went to the last great struggle cheered by the consciousness that there were many simple-hearted men who were not afraid to welcome His coming?

LXII.—THE BARREN FIG-TREE

“Master, behold, the fig-tree which Thou cursedst is withered away.”
—ST. MARK xi. 21.

THE difficulties connected with this miracle disappear when we think of it as a parable in action. It is significant that when Jesus wanted to show His disciples how profession without reality brought judgment, He did not select a human life, but a mere tree (*cf.* Acts v. 5; xiii. 11). He came not to condemn, but to save (St. John iii. 17).

1. *The Judgment of Insincerity.*—The point of the incident lay in the premature development of the tree. As the fruit of a fig-tree appears before the leaves, the tree was, metaphorically speaking, pretending to a premature fruitfulness. It was already barren of fruit, and the sentence was that barren it should remain. Its opportunity was over, while the opportunity of the other trees was still to come (verse 13).

2. *The Application of the Parable to the Nation.*—The Jewish people prided itself on its superiority to the nations around. The leaves of religious profession showed fair. But when Jesus came seeking fruit He found none. The Gentile world was still leafless, its opportunity was still to come; but Jerusalem had not known the time of its visitation. To every nation comes the same challenge—the same question—How far do your acts correspond with your professions? What fruit have you to satisfy the hunger of Jesus?

3. *Its Application to the Individual.*—Jesus had told His disciples “By their fruits ye shall know them.” There are lives that bear evil fruit—thorns and briars (Heb. vi. 8). But there are many lives that bear no fruit at all (see Kipling’s *Tomlinson*). And the punishment of fruitless lives is that they shall remain fruitless for ever. The leaves of outward profession wither, and nothing is left. The fig-tree had been planted in order that it might bear fruit for the use of men. It was failing in the object of its existence, and cloaking its failure with a fair outward show. It is right that a fig-tree should have leaves, but not in place of fruit; it is right that we should confess our faith before men, but not in place of the reality of Christian character.

LXIII.—THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.”—*St. MARK xi. 17 (R.V.).*

THE outer court, or Court of the Gentiles, had gradually developed into a market-place, where pilgrims could exchange their money for the sacred coins that alone were accepted for the half-shekel due from all faithful Israelites (Exod. xxx. 13; St. Matthew xvii. 24), and purchase the doves needed for sacrifice (St. Luke ii. 24). Besides being a desecration of the Temple area, this traffic afforded the opportunity for extortion, so that the place became “a den of thieves.” Our Lord had often seen the same scene, and St. John may refer to an earlier cleaning (St. John ii. 14 *ff.*), though it is more probable that he is recording the same incident, which he has transferred to an earlier period.

1. This is the only occasion in our Lord’s life when He is recorded as having used violence. Knowing, as He did, that His ministry was nearly ended, He threw out a deliberate challenge to the authorities, and fulfilled the prediction of Malachi iii. 1. It does not follow that His followers are justified in using the like violence against abuses. The King has rights that His servants do not share.

2. The act was a parable in action. It told His disciples that the kingdom was not only a kingdom of peace, but a kingdom of judgment. It would reverse human judgments and overturn human institutions. It would be as a burning fire against all that dishonoured the name of God (St. Matt. iii. 10). The Jew had forgotten that the house was a house of prayer "for all the nations," and had desecrated the Court of the Gentiles, whose rights Jesus vindicated.

3. Commercial trickery had intruded into the very court of the Temple, and by one dramatic act Jesus taught His disciples to be on the watch against the intrusion of the same spirit into the Church (see Acts v. 2; viii. 19). Do we not still need the warning? Whenever we present religion to men in the guise of a profitable investment, we are setting up the stalls of the money-changers in the House of God. Church history shows how difficult it is to keep the commercial spirit from corrupting the Church. And Jesus Christ still comes in judgment to cleanse the Father's Temple.

LXIV.—SUCCESSFUL PRAYER

"All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them."—ST. MARK xi. 24 (R.V.).

How are we to interpret this saying? Does it mean that we are to assume that every prayer that we pray is answered? Does it mean that every petition that is not granted is a proof of our want of faith? As we look at the saying more closely we see that there are conditions:

1. *A Right Attitude towards God.*—Faith is not mere credulity; it is confidence born of fellowship with God. Its power to remove mountains depends on the fact that we have made God's purpose ours (1 St. John iii. 22; v. 14). So Jesus did not say "whatsoever ye ask," but "whatsoever ye pray and ask"—for prayer is fellowship, and before we present our petitions we must put ourselves in tune with God.

2. *A Right Attitude towards ourselves.*—The word used for "receive" implies more than a passive attitude—we

must *take* what we ask for. Prayer commits us to action—every petition in the Lord's Prayer is a challenge to service. The man who prays, "Give us this day our daily bread," must *take* the answer by honest labour (Eph. iv. 28). The man who prays, "Thy kingdom come," must take the answer in earnest effort for the establishment of the kingdom. Prayer is never the abnegation of effort. "Oh, to be nothing" is not a Christian attitude.

3. *A Right Attitude towards others.*—In the words that follow Jesus warned His disciples that an unforgiving spirit destroyed the effectiveness of prayer. We cannot "believe that we have received" what we ask if we are not fulfilling the necessary conditions of prayer. That is why prayer will generally begin with confession, for forgiveness is our first need. It is only when we are "in love and charity with our neighbours" that we are able to "draw near with faith." The key to God's storehouse is given only to those who "abide in Him" (St. John xv. 7), for they only will know how to use it wisely.

LXV.—DISHONEST INQUIRERS

"By what authority doest Thou these things?"—ST. MARK xi. 28.

BOTH in His teaching and in His acts Jesus claimed and exercised an authority that invited inquiry (St. Mark i. 22, 27; ii. 10). Why, then, did He apparently evade the question when it was asked?

1. The question was, in itself, a reasonable one. It is one that every reader of the Gospels is obliged to face. This calm assumption of authority by One who claimed to be meek and lowly presents a problem of which the disciples were not fully aware till they looked back to the life as a completed whole. Prophets and apostles were quick to repudiate any authority inherent in them (see, *e.g.*, Acts iii. 12). No such repudiation is recorded in the life of Jesus.

2. Our Lord's counter-question was not a mere evasion. If they admitted the divine vocation of the Baptist, they might have remembered his attitude towards Jesus. But the main purpose of the question was to test their honesty

of mind. Had they tried to reach any decision about St. John, or had their attitude towards him been one of mere opportunism? Their fundamental insincerity was revealed in their answer. They had neither the honesty to confess nor the courage to deny. They cared for their own reputation more than they cared for the truth; and therefore they were incapable of understanding the truth.

3. The one condition for knowing the truth is faithfulness to the truth that we know already (St. John vii. 17). It is not to the learned, but to the sincere, that the secret of Jesus is revealed (St. Luke x. 21). An honest man may be perplexed about the Faith, but he will find the truth in the end; the man who takes refuge in agnosticism to avoid the trouble or cost of deciding moral questions can never hope to know the truth. Was not this refusal to face the facts what Jesus meant by the sin against the Holy Ghost, who is the "Spirit of the Truth" (St. John xvi. 13)? Life presents us with many insoluble questions, and if these men had said, "We have tried to decide this question, and are honestly perplexed," we may be sure that Jesus would not have sent them away unsatisfied. It was their insincerity that imposed an insuperable barrier between them and the truth.

LXVI.—A TRUST MISUSED

"He let it out to husbandmen and went into a far country."—ST. MARK xii. 1.

THE original significance of the parable is clear, but, like all the parables of Jesus, its meaning is not exhausted in its original purpose. Its lesson is for all times.

1. *Life as Trusteeship.*—Over the Royal Exchange are the words, "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." It was He who planted the vineyard of nature, and let it out to the human race that He had made, to till it for Him. And what have men made of the earth that He lent them? They have tried to turn a trust into a possession, and forgotten the Owner because He seemed far away (Rom. i. 21). How many of our troubles are the result of forgetting that we hold the earth in trust for

God! In the payment of his tithe the Jew was constantly reminded that the fruit of the vineyard was not his, but God's.

2. *The Patience of God.*—He sends to us again and again, asking for what He might take by force. He stands aside, leaving men free to refuse His claims if they will. And at last, in a supreme act of sacrifice, He sent His only begotten Son. Jesus came to plead with men to give God His due, not grudgingly nor of necessity, but gratefully and gladly. He who gave so much asked so little in return, and even that little men refused to give.

3. *The Final Rejection.*—Men begin by resenting the claims of religion, because it interferes with their business or "rights." They only ask to be let alone. But if religion will not let them alone, indifference soon passes into hostility (*cf.* St. Matt. xxii. 6). The Church will never be popular while it is faithful to its duty in claiming God's rights. Men crucified Christ because He would not allow them to ignore His claims. And, in the end, men lose what they have sinned to keep. The vineyard is given to others. Unscrupulous greed brings destruction; it is only the saints of the Most High who possess the kingdom; it is the meek who inherit the earth. It is only what we hold in trust for God that is really our own.

LXVII.—CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

"Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's."—ST. MARK xii. 17.

THE question propounded to our Lord was probably one on which the Pharisees and the Herodians would have differed, for the Pharisees were the patriotic or nationalist party, while the Herodians, in supporting Herod, were bound to recognize the authority on whom he depended. His answer might afford the opportunity of discrediting Him with the people, or embroiling Him with the authorities (St. Luke xxiii. 2). He might have refused to answer on the ground that political questions were not His business (*cf.* St. Luke xii. 14), but instead He took advantage of the

opportunity to lay down a general principle for the guidance of His disciples.

1. Our Lord's answer has no bearing on the question of the lawfulness of revolt against secular tyranny. What He said was, in effect, "While you accept the benefits of Roman rule, and trade under its protection, you are bound to contribute to its legitimate requirements" (*cf.* Rom. xiii. 6). Jeremiah advised submission to Babylon instead of futile efforts to trust in Egypt for deliverance, and Jesus knew that refusal to pay tribute would only bring political disaster.

2. In His answer Jesus warns us of two opposite dangers. Men may try to give to God what belongs to Cæsar—that is, they may neglect the duties of citizenship through a mistaken idea of the nature of God's claim. The man who does not trouble to vote at elections, or interest himself in political questions, is making this mistake. The text, "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver" applies to our rates and taxes as well as to the collections in church.

3. There is the opposite danger: we may regard good citizenship as an adequate substitute for the service of God. It is right that we should give our lives (if need be) for our country, but our souls belong only to God. When the Roman Empire demanded that the Christians should sacrifice to the gods, these words of Jesus enabled them to answer, "We cannot give to Cæsar what belongs to God." It is only in so far as the State accepts the teaching of Jesus Christ as the basis of its legislation that the two duties are brought into harmony. But disobedience to lawfully constituted authority is only justifiable where unfaithfulness to God is the alternative.

LXVIII.—THE RESURRECTION LIFE

"He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living."—*ST. MARK* xii. 27.

THE Sadducees, like many people of later times, tried to justify their disbelief in the resurrection by turning the idea into ridicule. The difficulty they propounded was a

real one, but the preposterous story that they concocted showed that they were not presenting it in the spirit of inquiry, but of mockery. Jesus ignored the mockery and met the question with a twofold answer.

1. The Sadducees pretended that the doctrine of the resurrection meant the perpetuation of the conditions of the present life—which is practically the Moslem view of the hereafter. Spiritualism has, in recent years, presented a similar view. But Jesus told them that the resurrection life was a life subject to different conditions. He did not deny the permanence of human affection beyond death, but the kind of exclusive mutual possession that is involved in marriage belongs to earthly experience. Speaking of the resurrection of those who have died in faith, He says, not that they are angels, but that they are *as* the angels in this, that love no longer needs, or finds, material expression. The spiritual body has no need of sacraments when it “sees God face to face.”

2. The Sadducees had quoted Moses in order to discredit the doctrine of the resurrection; so Jesus shows how the resurrection is implied in the name by which God made Himself known. The argument is not a mere verbal quibble; it rests on the fact of God's relation to individuals. If God cares for individual lives, those lives cannot perish at death. Early Hebrew thought was not clear as to the destiny of the individual, but Jesus showed how the truth of human immortality was implied in the belief that men could enter into communion with God. The question of the resurrection of the ungodly was not raised in the inquiry of the Sadducees, but perhaps we may regard our Lord's words as having a bearing on that difficult problem. If *any* man rises again, it is because God cares for him. If God ceased to love any man, would not his existence come to an end? May not even punishment be an evidence that God still loves? “He is not the God of the dead.”

LXIX.—THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

“What commandment is the first of all?”—ST. MARK xii. 28.

THE tendency to regard some particular breach of the moral law as specially sinful is one to which we are all liable. The result is that our teaching loses a right sense of proportion; and we find ourselves treating sexual sin or dishonesty or falsehood as though it was the one thing against which we ought to preach. Perhaps something of this kind was in the mind of the scribe when he asked his question. Is there one moral duty that stands supreme over all the rest? Jesus answered the question by going back to first principles.

1. *Unity as the Basis of Diversity.*—The moral law is one because God is one. As the water-lilies float on the surface as separate things, but all spring from one root, so the commandments of the law are applications of one principle. Scribism was in danger of losing sight of this inner unity, and treating each commandment as a separate injunction. But this meant losing sight of the real meaning of the law. The purpose of religion is to give unity to life by bringing it under one controlling influence. In modern technical language we may say that the aim of the moral teaching of Jesus was not psycho-analysis, but psycho-synthesis.

2. *Attitude as the Basis of Action.*—The importance of what we do is not to be found in the act itself, but in the attitude towards God and our neighbour that it reveals. It is on the heart—the inner self—that the law must be written (2 Cor. iii. 3; Eph. vi. 6). No mere external obedience has moral value. Love is the fulfilling of the law, because love means a right attitude towards God and men.

3. *The Duty of Love.*—How can love be obedience to a command? Is it not the essence of love that it is spontaneous, voluntary? I cannot love God because He commands me to. Is not the answer this—that love is the natural attitude of men towards God and one another? So the command means, strive to be your true self; to set

free the impulse of love that has been stifled by selfishness and low ideals. A man is "not far from the kingdom," when he recognizes that love is the supreme good; he passes into the kingdom when he puts forth the moral effort that is needed to awaken the love that is dormant within him, trusting in God for strength to succeed.

LXX.—JESUS CHRIST IS LORD

"David therefore himself calleth Him Lord; and whence is He then his son?"—ST. MARK xii. 37.

JESUS had been answering questions about the interpretation of Scripture, so now He asked one that, under the appearance of a mere verbal problem, involved the profoundest issue of Old Testament theology. Psalm cx. was universally recognized as referring to the Messiah. Had the religious teachers ever tried to think out all that was implied in that psalm?

1. *The Son of David.*—The title implies a line of historic succession. He who bore it must have a human ancestry, a relation to the national life of the people. The three first Gospels begin by placing Jesus in His human relationship to the world of men. Like a well-known modern writer, they start from the Jesus of history. Is this, as some men claim, all that we need?

2. *"My Lord."*—The Fourth Gospel starts, like the psalm, with a different picture. In the eternal world the Christ was "from the beginning with God." The Church has seen in the psalm a reference to the glorified Christ rather than to the pre-incarnate Son of God (Acts ii. 33; v. 31). But, in either case, He who bore the name of Son of David is presented as the Lord of the eternal world, seated at the right hand of God. How could these two pictures be reconciled?

3. They were reconciled in the experience of the Church (Rom. i. 3-4), and expressed themselves in the earliest Christian creed, "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. ii. 11). The Christ is Jesus and Lord—human and divine—an historical person in an historical world, and yet a divine Being from

the eternal world. So the question that our Lord raised in the minds of His disciples led straight to the heart of Christianity. It was in the attempt to answer it that Christian thought came to understand the full significance of that life that had been lived among men. As the Son of David, He is one with us; as "our Lord," He is infinitely far above us. And the link that connects these truths is in His title "the Christ"—the Anointed Deliverer in whom the infinite is linked with the finite, the divine with the human. As the Son of David, He is the world's true King; as "the Lord" He sat down on the throne of heaven.

LXXI.—THE SCRIBE-SPIRIT

"Beware of the scribes."—ST. MARK xii. 38.

IN the behaviour of the scribes our Lord saw the temptations against which all religious teachers have to be on their guard. An exactly similar picture is drawn of the medieval clergy by their critics on the eve of the Reformation. But it is not only the clergy who are in danger of forgetting the warning of Jesus; every Church worker needs to remember how easily the scribe-spirit may drive out the spirit of Jesus. There were three special characteristics of the scribe that St. Mark singles out from the longer denunciation recorded of Jesus in St. Matthew's Gospel (St. Matt. xxiii.):

1. *Ostentation*.—Jesus gives four illustrations: (1) they loved to parade in long, flowing robes that attracted attention; (2) they desired to be saluted with respect (contrast St. Matt. xxiii. 8); (3) they took pleasure in feeling that they were seated in the most conspicuous places in the synagogues; (4) they claimed the places of honour at banquets (contrast St. Luke xiv. 10). The custom of the time gave them the right to these marks of distinction, but instead of feeling that they were things of no importance as compared with their work as teachers, they revelled in all that ministered to pride and self-esteem.

2. *Avarice*.—They took advantage of the unprotected condition of widows to enrich themselves at their expense.

So they turned their sacred office into a way of gain (1 Tim. vi. 5; 1 St. Pet. v. 2), using their spiritual influence to despoil those who trusted them. St. Paul taught that they who preached the Gospel should live of the Gospel, but how carefully the Christian worker has to watch against the temptation to make profit out of his ministry.

3. *Hypocrisy*.—It was not the length of their prayers, but their motive, that Jesus denounced. When they prayed they were not thinking of God, but of other people. So their prayers brought not blessing but "greater condemnation" (Ps. cix. 7). They asked for the praises of men and they had their reward (St. Matt. vi. 5). Real prayer is measured not by its length but by its intensity. The publican's prayer of seven words was of more value than the Pharisee's of thirty-four.

LXXII.—THE WIDOW'S MITE

"This poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury."—ST. MARK xii. 43.

THE lesson of the incident is simple and familiar, but there are some points in the story that deserve special notice.

1. There is something very attractive in the picture of Jesus sitting near the colonnade where the thirteen trumpet-shaped money boxes stood to receive the offerings of the people. He saw the common people (*ochlos*) casting in their copper coins (*chalkos*), and the rich men throwing in larger offerings. And then suddenly His attention is attracted by an inconspicuous figure, just as, on another occasion, the crowd thronged Him, but one poor woman touched Him (St. Mark v. 31). Jesus was always interested in individuals; every human soul had its own special interest and value. For Him no human life was insignificant (in the right sense of the word).

2. He knew the circumstances of the widow's offering. Two mites was the minimum that was permitted as an offering, and the widow had earned this sum and no more, and brought it to the treasury of God. It was all her

available resources (*bios*). He knew, what no one else knew, that while others had given much, she had given all. We do well to remember that the motives and meaning of what we do are known to Him. Why should we be anxious for the approval of men? Is it not enough if He approves?

3. If the story had been a fiction, would it not have ended by our Lord calling the widow and rewarding her with some rich gift? But He allowed her to go unrecognized, because He knew that the gift was its own reward. With an empty purse and a glad heart she went back to her work, like so many simple-hearted men and women whose desire is not to parade, but to conceal, the sacrifice that they have made for God. Probably she never knew that her act had been seen and understood by One who was greater than the Temple. After His controversies with Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes, Jesus welcomed a simple act of devotion that He could commend. When we are tempted to feel that the world is out of joint, it is just such simple acts of devotion that restore our belief in humanity.

LXXIII.—THE SECRET OF ENDURANCE

"He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."—
ST. MARK xiii. 13.

IN answer to the disciples' inquiry, Jesus drew a picture of the coming age. It was not a picture of easy victory and tranquil development. He told them of conflicts, opposition, false leaders. They would be constantly subject to two dangers—the danger of despairing about the future, and the danger of being deceived by false christs. Both these dangers are still present. Endurance means keeping our hope and guarding our faith. What was the secret of endurance?

1. *Knowledge*.—He told them beforehand in order that when these things came to pass they might not be shaken "as though some strange thing was happening to them" (1 St. Pet. iv. 12). The easy optimism that says "All's right with the world" is always liable to be shattered against the

stern facts of life. The sailor can ride out the storm if he knows that it is coming.

2. *Watchfulness*.—"Take heed to yourselves." The man who is content to drift with the stream will find himself engulfed in the rapids. Jesus wanted His disciples to feel at every age that they were passing through a dangerous world, and that their security lay in constant watchfulness. At every period of change, the Christian man is to watch for the signs of the coming of Christ. History is not only evolutionary, but apocalyptic. The powers of the unseen world are constantly breaking in. "In such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh."

3. *Faith*.—"Watch, as though everything depended on you; pray, because everything depends on God." He told them that in time of danger they could depend on the help of the Holy Spirit. They were to "endure, as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. xi. 27). The secret of endurance is confident dependence on God. When false christs claimed their allegiance, they would be able to find the true Christ within, through the abiding of the Holy Spirit. In a world of disturbance and change, they could "repose in the unchanging faithfulness" of God. For He whom we call the Holy Spirit is God realized in the experience of the Christian Society. When human resources fail He becomes the source of our strength (Isa. xl. 31).

LXXIV.—THE TRANSITORY AND THE PERMANENT

"Heaven and earth shall pass away : but My words shall not pass away."—ST. MARK xiii. 31.

THROUGH all this discourse of our Lord there runs the thought of the contrast between the transitoriness of human institutions and the permanence of the kingdom of God. Perhaps He had Isaiah xl. 8 in mind (1 St. Pet. i. 25).

1. *The Heavens that Pass Away*.—Here heaven does not mean the dwelling-place of God, but the whole material universe (Gen. ii. 1). To primitive man, the material world seems the symbol of stability. The everlasting hills look

down unchanged on human generations. But modern science has destroyed the illusion of the permanence of things :

“ The hills are shadows, and they flow
From form to form, and nothing stands ;
They melt like mist, the solid lands,
Like clouds they shape themselves and go.”

Nature has in itself no power of renewal, its vitality is slowly ebbing away. In as far as man is a part of the material universe, he is subject to the “law of death.” “As a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.”

2. *The Earth that Passes Away.*—We may take the earth as representing human institutions. And in these, too, there is no permanence. The “illusion of security” is constantly being shattered, as the things that men think most secure crumble away. Are we not sometimes in danger of speaking of the kingdom of God as though it was merely a transformed human society? If that were all, it would be subject to the law of decay that belongs to every human society.

3. *What is Permanent?*—The answer of Jesus is that the moral principles that He taught would never pass away, because they were the moral principles of the eternal world. They were not, as some modern teachers assert, an *interims-ethic*—a temporary set of moral precepts meant to meet temporary needs. Nature may decay and human institutions perish, but the words of Jesus remain permanently true. So we are not to be “conformed to this world” (Rom. xii. 2), for this world passeth away and the lust thereof (1 St. John ii. 17). He who regulates his life in accordance with the words of Jesus has lifted it above the changes and chances of mortal life into the sphere of the eternal.

LXXV.—WOMAN'S OFFERING

“ She hath wrought a good work on Me.”—ST. MARK xiv. 6.

It may have been because Mary was still living in Bethany that the earliest account of this incident omits her name; by the time when the Fourth Gospel was written the identity

of the woman could be revealed, and the special motive of her offering explained. In defending the woman Jesus laid stress on three facts about her offering:

1. "*She hath wrought a good work on Me.*"—He recognized, and welcomed, the motive of personal devotion that underlay the act. It was as though He had said: "This is a matter between Mary and Me; it is not your business to criticize." There is always a danger that official authority may tend to discourage individual initiative. Jesus did not warn Mary against giving to Him the honour due to God, as a wise human teacher might have done, for Mary's instinct had penetrated, in part at least, the disguise that concealed the divine life of the Son of God.

2. "*She hath done what she could.*"—As once before, an attempt was being made to contrast the practical activities of service with the spirit of devotion (St. Luke x. 41). Jesus showed that there was a place for both. He accepts all forms of service that are offered to Him. He asks of men only what they can do. It was not Martha's energy, but her intolerance of other forms of devotion, that He rebuked. We cannot all serve in the same way, but love will find its appropriate form of service, and the practical man must not despise the devotion that shows itself in other ways.

3. "*She is come beforehand to anoint My body to the burying.*"—It was the last opportunity for this particular act of service. How much better it would be if we gave our precious ointments to the living instead of keeping them to do reverence to the dead. In view of His approaching death, Jesus valued all the more the expression of devotion that was eager to give its best. Sacrifice for a cause that is prospering has not the same value as sacrifice for a cause that seems doomed to fail.

LXXVI.—WHY THIS WASTE?

"Why was this waste of the ointment made?"—ST. MARK xiv. 4.

WE learn from St. John that the leader of the critics was Judas Iscariot, and St. Mark connects the incident with his resolve to betray his Master (verse 10). The sight of

another's devotion may harden the heart of a man who does not share it. Under the guise of a criticism of Mary the objectors were really criticizing Jesus for accepting the offering. Why were they wrong?

1. The criticism was insincere, as St. John tells us (St. John xii. 6). It is not those who really care most for social service who resent the offering of beautiful and fragrant things to God. People who object to appeals for foreign missions are not generally over-generous in their support of the needs of the Church at home. Anti-waste protests do not always come from those who are most careful in the regulation of their own expenditure. When we criticize the gifts of others we must ask ourselves whether it is an uneasy conscience or a real desire for the honour of God that is the motive of our protest.

2. The critics had forgotten that gratitude will always desire to express itself in the giving of its best. There is a right counting of the cost (St. Luke xiv. 28) that Jesus enjoined on His disciples; but there is a wrong counting of the cost that destroys the gladness of giving (2 Cor. ix. 7). The costly ointment and the widow's farthing were both acceptable gifts because they were gladly given.

3. The attempt to set the claims of Jesus against those of the poor ought to have been impossible then, and ought to be impossible now. We may be sure that Mary cared much more for the poor than Judas did. When Jesus said, "The poor ye have always with you," He did not mean to discourage efforts to get rid of poverty (a preposterous suggestion), but He meant that when He had left them they might still find a way of serving Him by serving the poor in His name. But love for Him would be the strongest motive for such service, and the men who frowned on love's gifts were the worst enemies of the poor. To advocate social service as an adequate substitute for devotion to Christ is to cut the tree away from its roots. Humanitarianism has never succeeded apart from the Christian motive.

LXXVII.—JUDAS THE TRAITOR

"And he sought how he might conveniently betray Him."—*ST. MARK* xiv. 11.

SOME writers have represented Judas as a monster of iniquity, a unique example of depravity; others have tried to represent him as influenced by motives less ignoble than mere desire for gain. It has been suggested that he wanted to force our Lord to declare Himself. But the story in the Gospels neither excuses nor exaggerates his crime.

1. Like all the early disciples, he probably joined Jesus from mixed motives. If He was the Christ, those who attached themselves to His service at the beginning might hope for high honours (*St. Matt. xix. 27*). He began by thinking of the service of Christ as a profitable investment. The rest gradually came to understand their Master better, but to Judas His teaching about the call for sacrifice remained a stumbling-block. He evidently concealed his feelings, for the other disciples did not know, till the very end, that he would prove a traitor.

2. Constant association with goodness has a hardening effect on a character that will not respond. A concealed sin poisons the whole nature of a man who allows it to fester in his inner life. The man who began to pilfer from the common store ended by selling his Master for the price of a slave (*St. John xii. 6*).

3. The man who is willing to betray his Master will not lack opportunities. The chief priests used him—and despised him. It was not a sudden and irresistible temptation that overwhelmed him; under the influence of covetousness his moral character gradually crumbled. His final treachery was a deliberate act. A man who does not learn to love what is good will learn to hate it. Our Lord's kindness must have been a constant reproach, till at last it became intolerable. The "waste" of the precious ointment seems to have given the final stimulus to his hatred; for it showed how completely he and his Master were out of sympathy with each other. If discipleship meant bringing one's best as a free gift, discipleship was sheer folly, and

the only amends that Judas could make to himself was to help to save the world from such false teaching. He discovered too late that a man must pay with his own soul for sin against love.

LXXVIII.—THE WATER-CARRIER

"There shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water."—ST. MARK xiv. 13.

How often the plans of Jesus depended on the quiet faithfulness of ordinary people. Knowing that He was surrounded with danger, He took steps to insure a quiet meeting with His disciples. He had probably arranged with a disciple in the city to have a room at His disposal. (Was this "goodman of the house" St. Mark's father?) And one of the servants of the house was entrusted with the task of guiding the two disciples to the place.

1. *It was a Humble Service.*—Why humble? Because in the East the carrying of water was generally the work of the women. A man bearing a pitcher of water would have been a rather unusual sight. The servant was called to do something which would make him the object of attention—perhaps even of ridicule. He probably did not know the reason for the command; we should like to believe that he, like his master, was a disciple of Jesus, but about that we know nothing.

2. *It was a Silent Service.*—"All service ranks the same with God." The "goodman" had his upper room ready, the disciples had their preparations to make, but someone must stand quietly at the gate of the city to link up the whole plan. No words passed, so far as we know, between him and the disciples, yet his service was essential. It is not always in speaking or conscious acting that we are called to serve. The silent carrying of a pitcher of water may be as real an act of service.

3. *It was a Service on which Great Issues depended.*—On the quiet faithfulness of this one man depended the possibility of that final passover feast which became the first Communion Service. If he had failed, how much would have been lost. Perhaps he never knew the im-

portance of what he did; great issues so often depend on simple obedience in common things. Nothing is really unimportant; carelessness in little things may hinder the purposes of God. It is only rarely that we are called to great acts of service, but the humblest servant of Jesus Christ may have to shoulder his pitcher of water, and only He understands what issues depend on our obedience.

LXXIX.—A FINAL APPEAL

"Verily I say unto you, One of you shall betray Me."—St. MARK xiv. 18.

THOUGH Jesus had recognized the flaw in the character of Judas long before, it was only recently that his evil purpose had ripened into action. He was not yet irretrievably committed, and so Jesus gave him one last opportunity for repentance. He would not allow him to go blindfold to his doom.

1. *A Last Revelation.*—It was made clear to Judas that the Master knew his secret. To denounce him by name would mean driving him to the betrayal, and the identity of the traitor was only revealed to St. John (St. John xiii. 26). Perhaps Jesus wanted all the apostles to examine themselves, for no man is safe unless he realizes his danger. The question, "Is it I?" implies a negative answer—"Surely it is not I?" According to St. Matthew (ch. xxvi. 25), Judas asked the question, and received the answer (perhaps inaudible to the rest), "Thou hast said."

2. *A Last Appeal.*—When Jesus dipped a piece of unleavened bread into the sauce that was placed on the table at the passover (in memory, it is said, of the clay out of which the Israelites made bricks in Egypt) and gave it to Judas, He was entering into the "covenant of bread" with him. To eat bread with a man was, in Eastern lands, a guarantee against betrayal. That Judas should eat bread with his Master, and forthwith go out to betray Him, shows how he had hardened his heart. Is not every Eucharist a "covenant of bread" with our Master—a guarantee that we will not betray Him?

3. *A Last Warning.*—Jesus knew now that the betrayal would come, yet He warned the man who was to betray Him that his responsibility was not less real. The deeds of evil men may be overruled to the fulfilment of the purpose of God, but every man is responsible for the wrong he does. It was not too late now for Judas to turn back, but Jesus foresaw that the lure of the thirty pieces of silver would prove too strong. There comes a point in human life where a man is committed to the wrong that he has resolved to do. He is caught in the current into which he has steered his boat and not even God can save him from going over the rapids. External circumstances are never too strong for a man till his will is resolutely turned towards evil. In making his own character, every man makes his own destiny.

LXXX.—THE LAST SUPPER

“Take ye : this is My body.”—ST. MARK xiv. 22.

ST. MARK's account of the Last Supper is the shortest and simplest of all the evangelists. It is, so to speak, fitted into the framework of the passover ceremonial. The passover was a festival of deliverance; it looked back to the bondage of Egypt, and was kept as an annual reminder of the redemption of the people. It was this thought that Jesus re-interpreted in the breaking of bread.

1. *The Promise of Deliverance.*—At the passover feast, the host broke the bread to remind those who were present of the bread of affliction that their fathers had eaten in Egypt. So when Jesus broke the bread, the disciples would have understood His action to mean, “There is a deliverance, of which this bread is a symbol, that I have come to bring.”

2. *The Cost of Deliverance.*—He gave a new significance to the breaking of the bread when He connected it with His death. And He deepened that significance when He gave the bread and the cup to them. For He told them by that act that the life given for them was also a life given to them. He was Himself both the giver and the gift. Per-

haps we may see in the act of breaking, and the pouring out of the wine into the cup, a symbol of the voluntary character of His sacrifice. "I am breaking My own body; I am pouring out My own blood" (*cf.* St. John x. 18).

3. *The Fulfilment of the Deliverance.*—The passover looked back to the past; but the new sacrament looked forward to the future. He told them that it was the last meal that He would eat with them before His passion, but He told them also that in the kingdom of God they would gather with Him again. The sacrament that He instituted was to carry their thoughts forward to that meeting over which there would hang no shadow of impending separation. And the new wine, like the new covenant, brought out the contrast between the old order that was passing away, and the power of renewal that belonged to the spiritual world into which He was lifting them. The wine of our sacrament grows old, but the reality that it expresses is always new. The idea of the kingdom of God as a feast was familiar to the Jews (St. Luke xiv. 15).

LXXXI.—THE DANGER OF OVER-CONFIDENCE

"All ye shall be offended."—ST. MARK xiv. 27.

TIMES of spiritual exultation are always times of danger. The Baptism is followed by the Temptation. So the Lord, who knew His disciples so much better than they knew themselves, warned them of a failure that He knew lay before them. Perhaps they were thinking that they would never do what Judas was doing. The censorious spirit is a constant danger.

1. *The Warning.*—He spoke of their desertion, not as a possibility, but as a certainty, applying to Himself the prophecy of Zechariah. Did He blame the sheep for scattering when the shepherd was smitten? If so, His blame was very tender. He may have wanted them to know, when their moment of panic was over, that He had foreseen and forgiven. But, most of all, He wanted them to learn that their only safety was in dependence (1 Cor. x. 12).

2. *The Protest*.—How little we know about ourselves. It seemed to them incredible that they should desert their Master, and when He revealed to St. Peter the deeper disloyalty of which he was to be guilty, the apostle waxed vehement in his repudiation. It was a genuine protest. They knew their own loyalty, but they did not know their own weakness. But Jesus knew both, and He did not feel about the desertion and denial that were the outcome of sudden weakness as He felt about the calculated treachery of Judas.

3. *The Promise*.—In the very moment when He foretold their failure He assured them of His forgiveness. "I will go before you into Galilee." In Jerusalem they were strangers, bewildered and frightened, but Galilee was their home, the place associated with the happiest memories of their fellowship with Him. So He told the scattered sheep that they would meet the shepherd again in the old familiar places, where they would find healing and comfort. No word of reproach—their own consciences would reproach them enough—but the promise of reunion when the danger was over. It was because He knew that their love was true that He assured them of His forgiveness (St. John xxi. 15).

LXXXII.—THE DISCIPLES WHO SLEPT

"And He cometh, and findeth them sleeping."—ST. MARK xiv. 37.

ONCE before He had taken the three apostles away from the rest that they might be with Him on the mountain while He prayed. And, as then, so now, while He prayed they slept (St. Luke ix. 32). It might have been right for them to sleep then, but now He had bidden them to watch.

1. *Sympathy*.—Even when we are striving or sorrowing alone, it helps us to know that someone is thinking of us. Independence of human sympathy is not the mark of a really great character. Perhaps the disciples did not understand how much it meant to their Master that they should watch with Him. He had generally seemed independent, self-reliant. According to St. Luke, it was partly sorrow that made them sleep. They were enervated, not braced,

by the nearness of the cross. So, already, they began to fail Him in His hour of need. His last words—"Sleep on now"—were spoken in gentle irony. They had lost the opportunity of watching with Him.

2. *Self-Control*.—Watchfulness and self-control are associated together (1 Thess. v. 6; 1 St. Pet. v. 7). In times of danger a man must learn to control his "flesh"; or he will enter into temptation. Men who sleep when they are told to watch cannot be good soldiers. It is not enough for the spirit to be willing, if it cannot make its will effective. It was only when the Holy Spirit came to strengthen their spirits that the disciples learnt how to watch and pray.

3. *Service*.—The three apostles were the staff of the little army of Jesus. They were left on guard while their Captain prayed. How could they be ready to serve if He found them asleep? They were to carry on the campaign when He had left them, and so He taught them they must be alert and ready for any call that came. Even times of devotion may degenerate into a kind of spiritual drowsiness unless we remember that we are soldiers on active service. The Christian life is not dreaming, but doing. Only when the long day's task is done "He giveth His beloved sleep." The sleeper is unconscious of the world around him; the Christian is to be alive to the reality of the spiritual world, lest his Master comes and finds him sleeping.

LXXXIII.—GETHSEMANE

"Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee; remove this cup from Me: howbeit not what I will, but what Thou wilt."—ST. MARK xiv. 36.

THIS was the only unanswered prayer recorded in the life of Jesus. Yet in a deeper sense the prayer was answered before it was finished.

1. *It shows us the Reality of the Humanity of Jesus*.—No human heart could contemplate the tremendous conflict that lay before Him without shrinking. The Stoic attitude is not Christian, and there is no sin in shrinking from suffering (*cf.* 2 Cor. xii. 8). Many men have gone to

martyrdom with a smile on their lips, but the death of Jesus was much more than a martyrdom. As at the beginning, so at the end of His earthly ministry, He was tempted to yield to the desire of the human spirit to avoid the path of suffering.

2. *It shows us how Perfect was His Trust in God.*—"All things are possible unto Thee" (St. Mark x. 27). As Son of God Jesus might have "saved Himself," but only by leaving the world to perish (St. John x. 18). He endured the Cross, not through any morbid desire for self-oblation, but as a deliberate act of obedience (Heb. v. 8). When He said to His disciples, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak," was He not thinking of His own agony?

3. *It shows us the Triumph of Will over Feeling.*—"Not what I will, but what Thou wilt." Behind every prayer that we pray there is this implied condition. It is more important that the will of God should be done than that we should be delivered from suffering. Only the suffering is transformed into gladness when we know that God has said, "It is My will." Sin only begins when the will relinquishes its control, and we drift rudderless through the seas. The highest form of prayer is "Thy will be done." It is much more than resignation; it is the deliberate bringing of our wills in tune with His. When we speak of the sinlessness of Jesus, what we mean is not only that He did nothing wrong, but that He willed nothing but the will of His Father (St. John iv. 34; v. 30). What He willed as man, and what He willed as God, was always the same thing (contrast Rom. vii. 15-24).

LXXXIV.—THE APPOINTED HOUR

"It is enough; the hour is come."—ST. MARK xiv. 42.

No reader of the Gospel can miss the thrill of these words. It is always thrilling when some long-expected crisis is reached and a man girds himself to meet it. But the hour of which He spoke was not only the supreme crisis of His life; it was the supreme crisis of all human history—the hour for which all human history had been a preparation.

1. *It was an Expected Hour.*—For most of us the great crises of life come unexpectedly, but Jesus knew from the first that all His life was leading up to a supreme moment. He came, not only to heal and teach, but most of all to die. We shall never rightly understand His life unless we remember that He thought of Himself as “the Lamb of God” destined to sacrifice. May we not hear almost a sigh of relief in the words? The time of waiting was over; now at last the way lay clear before Him.

2. *It was an Appointed Hour*—the hour appointed by “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts ii. 23). Behind human freedom lies the purpose of God; history is made by human action, yet the destined hour strikes when God wills. The word translated “It is enough” does not mean (as some commentators think) “You have slept long enough”; it means “All preparations are now complete.” Everything had worked out as God intended; nothing remained now but to go forth to meet the Cross. The secret of strength in the crises of life is in the assurance that it is not blind chance, but the hand of God, that directs our lives (Rom. viii. 28).

3. *May we not see in the word another thought?*—The hour had come, but it would pass. To the disciples it might seem the end of all things, but He could see the light beyond the shadow. So He did not say, “The end has come,” for it was not the end. Hours belong to the life of time; eternity is measured by other standards. However dark the hour, we can still be captains of our soul if we remember that our true life lies beyond time (2 Cor. iv. 17). It is only “for a season” that we are in heaviness (1 St. Pet. i. 6). “Joy cometh in the morning.”

LXXXV.—MISTAKEN ZEAL

“And a certain one of them that stood by drew his sword, and smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.”—ST. MARK xiv. 47.

WE learn from the Fourth Gospel that the “certain one” was St. Peter, and the vehement but mistaken championship of the Master was exactly in accordance with the

character of the apostle. He had already shown how he resented the idea of his Master suffering (St. Mark viii. 32). So now he draws his fisherman's knife and strikes out recklessly at the crowd.

1. *Zeal without Obedience.*—Jesus had given no orders for resistance; it was no part of His purpose to meet violence by violence (St. John xviii. 36). How often since then men have made the same mistake of thinking that carnal weapons could further the cause of the kingdom (2 Cor. x. 4). And how often the words of Jesus have been fulfilled (St. Matt. xxvi. 52). Writing long afterwards, St. Peter reminds his readers of the meekness of Jesus (1 St. Pet. ii. 23; iii. 9).

2. *Zeal without Faith.*—There is a sense of distrust in the act. It was as though the apostle thought: "Our Master has lost His courage; we must rescue Him in spite of Himself." He thought that he knew better than Jesus what was the right thing to do. It is faith that checks the impulse to hasty action; that does not cry "All is lost" when brute force seems to bear down on moral strength. Yet Jesus knew, even then, that the apostle's love was stronger than his faith; and it was love that He cared for most (St. John xxi. 15-17).

3. *Zeal without Courage.*—There was physical courage in the act; to attack single-handed an armed crowd was not an act of a coward. Yet there is a higher courage that a man needs in the crises of life, and it was the lack of that higher courage that led the disciples to forsake Him and flee when He would not let them fight for Him. Physical danger is not so hard to bear as contempt and derision and reproaches (1 St. Pet. iv. 14). To stand by the cause that seems to be failing, to endure without bitterness the scorn of men—that is hard to do. We condemn the apostle; yet the zeal that struck out in the dark has its lesson for us. The method was wrong, but the motive was right. We ought to feel indignant when men insult Jesus Christ; but we cannot fight the world with the world's weapons.

LXXXVI.—THE YOUNG MAN WHO FLED

"He left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked."—ST. MARK xiv. 52.

THE only explanation of the introduction of this unimportant incident into the story is that the young man was St. Mark himself. If (as is probable) the house in which Jesus kept the passover was St. Mark's father's house, we can reconstruct the course of events. St. Mark had probably laid aside his upper garment to help in serving the guests, and may have heard part of our Lord's conversation with His disciples. It may have been partly a boyish spirit of adventure, partly a deeper feeling, that led him to cast a linen cloak around him and follow the little band to Gethsemane. So youth is wont to follow.

1. *He Followed*.—He had caught something of the enthusiasm of discipleship without counting the cost. The white garment of consecration enfolded him, and perhaps he hoped to dare great things for Jesus. So, years after, he attached himself to Paul and Barnabas as they started on their first missionary adventure, eager to share their dangers and adventures.

2. *He Feared*.—"The young men laid hold on him." His contemporaries tried to hinder him from following. Of how many young disciples that is still true. The influence of their associations is too strong for them. They shrink away from the Cross because they are afraid of the opinion of others.

3. *He Fled*.—He left the white robe of consecration in their hands and ran away, discouraged at the cost of discipleship. So, years after, he left Paul and Barnabas and returned to Jerusalem (Acts xiii. 13), deserting his post when difficulties began.

4. But this is not the end of the story. A man "may rise on stepping-stones of his dead self to higher things." In the end St. Mark proved himself a good soldier of Jesus Christ, "profitable for the ministry" (2 Tim. iv. 11). Jesus Christ does not lightly surrender a disciple who has once felt the impulse to follow. He who fails to-day may succeed to-morrow if his heart is true. St. Barnabas

proved himself a true "son of encouragement" when he determined to give his young cousin another chance (Acts xv. 37). "A man may fail in duty twice, and the third time may prosper."

LXXXVII.—THE TWO JUDGMENT-BARS

"Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."—ST. MARK xiv. 62.

STANDING at the judgment-bar of the high priest, Jesus appeals to another judgment-bar, where those who were judging Him then would appear before Him as their Judge. He is referring to Daniel vii. 13, and applying the prediction of universal sovereignty to Himself, as His hearers recognized. From any other lips such a claim would have been monstrous blasphemy. That judgment-bar would be :

1. *The Vindication of Love.*—The high priest's court was foul with hatred. No pity or sympathy for the accused had any place there. Love stood apparently helpless before hate. But at that other judgment-bar hatred would stand impotent before love. Love is the judge before whom every man must stand at the last, and by his response to love he shall be judged. A religion that made it possible for men to hate goodness, as these men hated Jesus, was self-condemned.

2. *The Vindication of Justice.*—The high priest and his colleagues set justice at naught in their efforts to secure the condemnation of Jesus. Only when their false witnesses broke down did they challenge Him to convict Himself. But at the other judgment-bar falsehood would shrivel in the clear light of absolute truth. From the injustice of men Jesus appeals to a justice that cannot err (*cf.* 1 Cor. iv. 4). Our safeguard against falseness and injustice in our dealings with one another is in remembering that "we shall all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ" (Rom. xiv. 10; 2 Cor. v. 10). Jesus "reviled not again" because He could appeal to that higher tribunal (1 St. Pet. ii. 23).

3. *The Vindication of Power.*—Human injustice is impotent. The high priest's condemnation only brought nearer the victory of Christ. He enthroned for ever the life that he tried to destroy. But at the other judgment-bar the verdict would stand; for perfect love and perfect justice are irresistible. No other verdict on human life matters in the end but the verdict of the Son of Man. The supreme question for every man is what Jesus Christ will say of his life. From that verdict there is no appeal.

LXXXVIII.—“SIFTED AS WHEAT”

“And when he thought thereon, he wept.”—ST. MARK xiv. 72.

IF (as is generally supposed) St. Mark is reporting St. Peter's teaching, the story of the apostle's denial must have been told by himself. It is a story to awaken pity and fear—pity for a brave man's failure, and fear lest, with far less excuse than he, we, too, prove faithless in the hour of danger. Consider:

1. *The Denial.*—Many emotions must have been present in the mind of the apostle—the desire to be near his Master, the sense of loneliness in a hostile crowd, bewilderment at the sudden crisis. Was he bound to betray himself when no good would come from the confession? In the growing vehemence of the denial we can see the sign of an uneasy conscience. He could deny his Master with his lips, but his heart was protesting all the time.

2. *The Remembrance.*—Words that Jesus had spoken a little while ago came back to him, through the simple incident of a cock-crow. How often memory is stirred by just such simple things, so that “the meanest flower that blows can give thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.” Repentance begins with remembrance, just as sin often begins with forgetfulness. But if we are to remember, we must first have known. Happy is the man who, at the moment when he has failed, can recall some word of Jesus to arouse his stifled conscience.

3. *The Repentance.*—It was not because his self-reliance had been humbled that he wept; it was because he had

failed his Master, whom he loved. A loveless heart has no tears to weep. The secret of repentance is the recognition that we have wronged the love of God. "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." The reality of the apostle's loyalty was shown by the instantaneous effect of the remembrance. In one moment he saw his own disloyalty, and went out broken-hearted. Failure and repentance are the stepping-stones by which God leads us upward towards that fuller fellowship in which we stand above all peril of failure, because we know that His grace is sufficient for us. It is only the sins for which we have not wept that separate us from Him.

LXXXIX.—MORAL COWARDICE

"Pilate, willing to content the people."—ST. MARK XV. 15.

It is a mistake to think of Pilate as a monster of iniquity. He was just a man of the world, willing to do right when it was easy, and anxious to evade responsibility when it involved sacrifice. Confronted by a supreme opportunity of doing right in scorn of consequence, he failed. The same alternative is being offered to men every day, and they fail, as Pilate failed, because they lack moral courage.

1. He first tried to throw the responsibility on Jesus. But the silence of Jesus was a refusal to save him from the responsibility of deciding. Pilate knew the motive of the chief priests, and knew that the refusal of Jesus to answer the charge meant that there was no charge to answer. His conscience told him that an innocent man was being hounded to death by envy. So Jesus stood silent, for every man must face his own moral responsibilities.

2. Then he tried to throw the responsibility on the people by taking advantage of the curious custom, the origin of which is obscure, of releasing a prisoner at the feast-time. But the people, misled by their religious leaders, asked for one who represented more nearly the popular idea of the Messiah. By the kind of man whom it exalts as its hero a nation is judged; so the Jewish people judged itself when it cried: "Not this man, but Barabbas."

3. In the end Pilate was obliged to accept the responsibility. No compromise was possible; either he must release Jesus, as his conscience told him he ought to do, or sacrifice Him for the sake of popularity and apparent security. When a man begins to play with his conscience the end is almost always the same—he prefers the easy course to the right. And whenever a man does that he follows in the way of Pilate and crucifies Christ afresh (Heb. vi. 6). For whenever a man is called to do right it is Jesus who stands silently at the judgment-bar of his heart; and every act of moral cowardice is a rejection of Jesus. Pilate's previous career made it hard for him to run the risk of unpopularity, and the fate of a Galilean peasant seemed of little importance compared with his own career. So he committed the supreme crime of history, preferring expediency to right, and "delivered Jesus to be crucified."

XC.—THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE CROSS

"They compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by . . . to bear His cross."—ST. MARK XV. 21.

It was part of the indignity of a crucifixion that the condemned man was made to carry his cross through the streets to the place of execution. But the collapse of the physical strength of Jesus obliged the centurion in charge of the party to conscribe a passer-by to relieve Him of the burden. No disciple came forward to volunteer for the service, but a stranger from North Africa, meeting the crowd perhaps at the gate, was compelled to accept it.

1. *The Fellowship of a Common Injustice.*—The contemptuous disregard for the rights of unimportant individuals was characteristic of the behaviour of a conquering race in dealing with subject peoples. The injustice that had condemned Jesus now forced on Simon the ignominy of carrying a cross—little knowing that it had given him the highest honour that it had to give. Any man who suffers injustice and wrong is, however unwillingly and unconsciously, following in the footsteps of Jesus (1 St. Pet. ii. 21).

2. *The Fellowship of a Common Burden.*—The injustice of men brought Simon into personal contact with Jesus. For the moment they were fellow-sufferers. Few words could have passed between them, but the patient courage of Jesus must have spoken to Simon, as it did to the thief on the cross and to the centurion standing by it. How often it has been the men whom the world has wronged who have entered into the meaning of the Cross.

3. *The Fellowship of a Common Life.*—The mention of Alexander and Rufus, as men known to readers of the Gospel, seems to suggest that Simon the Cyrenian had become a member of the Christian society. He had literally "gone forth without the gate, bearing His reproach" (Heb. xiii. 13); and so the reproach of Christ became his glory (Heb. xi. 26; Rom. viii. 17). To share, in any way, in the sufferings of Christ means entering into fellowship with Him (1 St. Pet. iv. 14). Resentment and bitterness disappear when we recognize that it is His Cross that we are carrying. Roman soldiers could compel Simon to bear His Cross, but only Jesus could turn the compulsion into willing service because it was done for Him.

XCI.—THE TRIUMPH OF HATRED

"They that passed by railled on Him."—ST. MARK xv. 29.

IN his brief account of the crucifixion St. Mark tells us less than the other evangelists of the words and acts of Jesus; what we see is the brutality and mockery that surrounded Him while He suffered. All that is base and ignoble in human nature seemed to be called out by the spectacle of Jesus on the Cross.

1. *Brutality.*—The Roman soldiers, brutalized by the constant crucifixions in which they took part, found no appeal to compassion in the patience of the Sufferer. The cruelty that cares nothing for the suffering that it inflicts is part of the inheritance that man has brought from the brute world; it persists still, even in Christian lands, and is one of the evil tendencies of our nature against which we have constantly to watch and pray.

2. *Deliberate Vindictiveness.*—The mockery of the chief priests was the expression of their triumph over a dangerous rival. Perhaps they wanted to counteract the impression of Pilate's scornful *titulus* by showing how little they recognized the Kingship of Jesus. What strange passions of hate religion is capable of arousing in men when they feel that their dignity or authority is being challenged! It would be a false optimism to believe that men are not capable still of the same hatred of Jesus if His claims came into conflict with their interests.

3. *Motiveless Malignity.*—It is more difficult to account for the malignant energy with which the casual passers-by joined in. To them, at least, Jesus had done no harm. Yet this cowardly love of making sport at apparent failure and defeat belongs to human nature. It requires more than a spark of nobility in a man to respect high ideals when they are nailed to a cross. *Vox populi* is not always *vox Dei*. The temptation to shout with the crowd is one that we must resist till we know that the crowd is shouting on the right side.

What is the lesson of all this? Surely that we should recognize the awful possibilities of evil that lie dormant in our nature, and ask ourselves the question: "If I had been there, what should I have done?"

XCII.—THE CRISIS

"Jesus cried with a loud voice, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"—ST. MARK xv. 34.

WITH this cry of Jesus we reach the climax of the crucifixion. We may well believe that Psalm xxii. was constantly present in the thoughts of Jesus during the days just before His death, and when the opening words of the psalm were forced from His lips in a moment of supreme agony He was thinking, not of these words alone, but of the whole attitude of the Psalmist. We must not read into the words of Jesus more than they mean.

1. *They show the Reality of His Suffering.*—The agony of the Cross was not only physical but spiritual. Love

suffered in the midst of hatred, gentleness in the midst of violence; no angel appeared to strengthen Him; no voice broke through the darkness to say, "This is My beloved Son." We can dimly see how this spiritual isolation was needed for the completeness of the sacrifice; but we can see also how it lifts the Cross above all other tragedies of human suffering.

2. *They are not a Cry of Despair, but an Appeal.*—The psalm that opens with these words closes with a note of triumph. Despair is silent; while the human heart can still cry out to God it has not surrendered its trust. Against life's worst evils there is still a court of appeal, and when every other source of strength has failed the righteous man can still claim that God shall not forsake him. So, even in the darkest hour, "they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength."

3. *May we not say that they are an Appeal from Feeling to Fact?*—The mind may be overshadowed by the sense of desolation, yet the fact of God remains. God was never nearer to humanity than at the moment when humanity, in the Person of its great Representative, seemed almost alone. Faith's ultimate resting-place is not in what we feel, but in what we know. The sun has not gone out when the world is in darkness. The cry from the Cross brings Jesus Christ nearer to us than any other word that He spoke, for it tells us that depression only becomes sinful when we yield to it instead of appealing against it. The baffling enigma of suffering remains a tremendous reality. In our perplexity we can only ask, "Why?" and hold to the confidence that the answer will come in God's good time. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved."

XCIII.—THE DEATH OF JESUS

"Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost."—ST. MARK XV. 37.

ST MARK'S word is the exact equivalent of the word "expire." He breathed out His spirit. What is the significance of this end?

1. *It completed the Identification of Jesus Christ with Humanity.*—The Church asserted the reality of the death of Christ (as against the "Docetæ") because it was an essential fact of His true humanity. He was made in all things like unto His brethren (Heb. ii. 14). Whatever death means to Christian men it has already meant to Him. By passing through death He delivered men from the fear of death (Heb. ii. 15).

2. *It completed His offering of Obedience.*—He "became obedient unto death" (Phil. ii. 8). No man's record is complete till he dies. In John Bunyan's dream he saw "that there was a way to hell, even from the gates of heaven." A man may falter at the last, instead of enduring to the end. But the death of Jesus was a deliberate fulfilment of the Father's will. If, like Elijah, He had been carried from the Cross by hosts of angels, the offering of obedience, by which the world was redeemed, would have been incomplete (St. Matt. xxvi. 43, 54).

3. *It ended the "straitening" that belonged to the Earthly Life of the Son of God* (St. Luke xii. 50).—May we not say that, till His death, the divine in Him was subject, in some real sense, to the human; henceforth the human was wholly subject to the divine? So the death of Jesus meant the setting free of His whole personality (1 St. Pet. iii. 18). He "entered into His glory" by the gateway of death (St. Luke xxiv. 26). The heathen world thought of death as reducing man to impotence; but the death of Jesus gave new powers to His divine manhood. His disembodied spirit passed as a conqueror into the world of the dead; while His broken body rested in the rock-hewn tomb till He reclaimed it incorruptible and glorified. So death, for Him, meant deliverance. The "loud voice" that startled the centurion who watched by the Cross was not a cry of agony, but a shout of triumph; the cry of the victor who knows that at last the battle is over.

XCIV.—THE RENT VEIL

"The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom."—ST. MARK xv. 38.

THE veil was the heavy curtain that separated the holy place from the holy of holies. According to Edersheim, it was sixty feet high and thirty feet broad, made of seventy-two separate squares joined together, and as thick as the palm of the hand. It must have been about the time of the evening sacrifice that it was suddenly rent, and the darkness of the inner sanctuary exposed to view. What did it mean?

1. *The Veil of Separation.*—The veil was the symbol of the separation between God and men (Heb. ix. 3). Beyond it no man might enter, except the high priest once a year. No human hand dare tear it aside, for man has lost his right to fellowship with God, and only God could restore it to him again.

2. *The Veil removed.*—The veil was rent "from the top to the bottom"—that is, by other than human hands. It was not gradually lifted, as though by a natural process, but violently rent, as though the power of the unseen was breaking through an obstacle. For it was man, not God, who had raised the barrier of separation, and it was God who broke through with the energy of a love that would not be denied. Then consider how the rending of the veil coincided with the consummation of man's supreme crime against God. Here is a paradox of the Atonement—that the same act was man's repudiation of God and God's reconciliation with man (Eph. ii. 16; Col. i. 21).

3. The Epistle to the Hebrews gives another interpretation to the symbol. The flesh (the earthly life) of Jesus had been as a veil hiding the Divine from the eyes of men (Heb. x. 20). But on the Cross the flesh was rent, and through the rent flesh of His crucified humanity the Godhead became manifest. No veil of flesh now conceals the divine life of the Son of God. If any veil conceals Him it is the veil on our own hearts (2 Cor. iii. 15). We may "enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus."

4. To the Jews the rending of the veil has yet another meaning. It was a sign that the old order was passing away. They had accused Jesus of saying He would "destroy this temple," and, in a deep sense, this charge was true (St. John iv. 21). They had not known the time of their visitation, and now their house was left desolate.

XCV.—THE CENTURION'S TESTIMONY

"When the centurion, which stood over against Him, saw that He so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God."—St. MARK xv. 39.

It would be the duty of the centurion in charge of the execution to stand by to prevent interference, and this man would therefore have been near the Cross during the whole time. He must have heard the jeers, "If Thou be the Son of God," and he declared, presumably to someone standing by him, that the title given in mockery was true.

1. The testimony tells us of the influence of the character of Jesus on an impartial observer. To the chief priests, blinded by hatred, and to the people, too easily influenced by their religious leaders, He seemed only a beaten impostor. As once before (St. Luke vii. 9), a Roman centurion showed deeper insight into the truth than the Jewish crowd.

2. It tells us how patient endurance may overcome. Like the dying thief, this Roman officer saw only an apparently helpless sufferer, but both alike felt that God was on the side of the crucified. The character of God may be vindicated by the way in which men bear suffering (1 St. Pet. iii. 14; iv. 14). Querulous resentment was impossible to One in whom the weakness of the flesh was conquered by the willingness of the spirit. The victories of the Cross are still won in the schools of suffering.

3. The right translation is "a son of God." All that the centurion meant was that Jesus had shown in His death that He was a man of God; the deeper truth involved in the name "Son of God" was not present in his mind. So he represents the kind of man who in every age has been

attracted by the beauty of the character of Jesus without recognizing the full nature of His claim. There is no reason to suppose that he ever became a member of the Christian society. He had seen a good man die; he did not ask himself whether that death had a deeper meaning than he supposed. He did not behold "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." It is not enough to admire the patient heroism of Jesus; the Cross was not only a martyrdom, but a sacrifice; not only an act of men, but an act of God (Acts ii. 23).

XCVI.—JOSEPH OF ARIMATHÆA

"He boldly went in unto Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus."—
ST. MARK XV. 43.

A FEW members of the Council had not consented to the condemnation of Jesus (St. Luke xxiii. 51), and two of them, Joseph and Nicodemus (St. John xix. 39), ventured publicly to show their disapproval in the only way that seemed possible. To them it was due that the sacred body was not flung into a malefactor's grave.

1. *Courage*.—Only a courageous man would have dared to separate himself from his colleagues at the moment when their triumph seemed complete, and when there was least to gain by showing his sympathy with a cause that appeared lost. To the disciples the act of Joseph was the one bright spot in the dark picture, and it is recorded in all the Gospels.

2. *Reverence*.—It is a deep instinct that teaches us that it is right to show respect to the body, even when the soul has left it. The loving care that brought the linen cloth and spices, and gave its own new tomb as a resting-place for the body of Jesus, was not wasted (*cf.* St. Mark xiv. 8). It is not probable that Joseph had any hope of a resurrection. But where faith failed, love remained true. The ultimate question is not how much do you believe, but how much do you love?

3. *Discipleship*.—According to St. Matthew, Joseph was already Jesus' disciple, and St. John adds "but secretly, for

fear of the Jews." But secret discipleship must, sooner or later, become open confession. Later legend tells us how Joseph, with eleven companions, came to Britain in A.D. 63, and built the earliest Christian church with twisted twigs at Glastonbury. The story of how he brought with him the Holy Grail (the cup used at the Last Supper) belongs to a later date. Though these stories rest only on late authority, they may represent an early tradition based on the missionary labours of Joseph of Arimathæa. We can hardly doubt that a man who was ready to risk unpopularity and even danger in order to show his loyalty to Jesus in the hour of His apparent failure would gladly identify himself with the cause when the resurrection of Jesus had turned despondency into gladness.

XCVII.—AT THE GRAVE OF JESUS

"He laid Him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock."—**ST. MARK** xv. 46.

THE human spirit of Jesus had passed into Paradise where the faithful dead rest in the hands of God (St. Luke xxiii. 43), and which the Jews believed to be situated in "the lower parts of the earth" (Eph. iv. 9). It was only His body that men could care for now. In the rock-hewn tomb that body kept its Sabbath, waiting for the return of the Spirit that would raise it to new life (Rom. viii. 11).

1. *Rest*.—The body of Jesus had been offered as a sacrifice (Heb. x. 10); it had been the instrument through which the Divine had served and suffered. Now the suffering was over, and the body lay at rest, while the Spirit that had dwelt in it passed through the experience that St. Paul had described as being "unclothed" (2 Cor. v. 2). This is what the clause in the Creed means by the assertion, "He descended into hell" (i.e., *hades*). His death was a reality.

2. *Safety*.—The care of friends and the malice of enemies (St. Matt. xxvii. 63) both helped to secure the protection of the sacred body from interference. It could neither be removed by over-zealous disciples, nor outraged by hostile hands. The promise of Psalm xci. 11 was fulfilled, for while

human guards watched outside, angel guards kept watch within.

3. *Restoration*.—The human body must obey the decree, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." We "sow not that body that shall be." But the Church believed that the body of Jesus "saw not corruption," but passed at once into a new order of being as a "spiritual body." How the mysterious change took place we do not know; only we know that when the Spirit returned a glorified Body had been made ready as the instrument of an eternal service. It was not merely restored to life, as the body of Lazarus had been; it was transformed, as the three apostles had once seen it transformed on the Mount of Transfiguration, but now permanently. The habit of identifying a man with his body (as when we speak of burying a friend) is the exaggeration of a real truth. The body is an essential part of true humanity. If the body of Jesus had crumbled into dust in the tomb, could we feel that He was in any real sense human still?

XCVIII.—DAYBREAK FEARS

"They fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed."
—ST. MARK xvi. 8.

THE day that was destined to be the gladdest day in the world's history opens with anxiety and fear. The same impulse of love that had shown itself at Bethany a week before led a little company of women to come in the twilight of the morning, bringing sweet spices and ointments. It was only when they drew near to the sepulchre that the difficulties of their task began to come home to them.

1. *The Fear of the Expected*.—They remembered the stone that they had seen rolled across the door of the tomb. Even if the watch had been withdrawn, they had not the courage to break the seal, nor the strength to move the stone. Yet they dared to go forward till the tomb was in sight, and then they saw that the stone had been rolled aside, so as to leave the entry open. Difficulties that seemed insuperable when we see them afar off find their

solution if we go forward courageously. We find that the stone has been rolled away.

2. *The Fear of the Unexpected.*—The difficulty that they expected to meet was solved, but now they were confronted by what they did not expect. Where they expected to find the body of Jesus they saw a young man in white—a supernatural messenger sent to welcome and reassure them. The terror and amazement produced by the sight shows how completely any idea of a resurrection was absent from their minds. It was in vain that he bade them “Be not terrified.” In the presence of the supernatural men are always liable to an unreasoning fear. Yet it was a message of love and goodwill that the angel came to bring—a message that, when it had had time to sink into their minds, would lift them above all fear. For how can they be afraid of the unknown who are at one with the risen Christ? What the resurrection means is that the invisible world is subject to One who is still the Good Shepherd, who cares for all His sheep. Nothing out of that world can harm us if we are His.

3. *Fear Overcome.*—We know from the other Gospels that the women soon recovered from their panic and went to tell the disciples. The best cure for unreasoning fear is the fulfilment of some simple duty. We realise the meaning of the truth that we discover when we go to tell it to others.

XCIX.—THE ETERNAL QUEST

“Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: He is risen; He is not here.”—ST. MARK xvi. 6.

How naturally the thoughts of the disciples turned to the tomb which contained all of their Master that seemed left to them. At least they could bring their gifts to Him there, though He would never know.

1. *The Eternal Quest.*—To-day men are still seeking Jesus of Nazareth. They are appealing from the Christ of theology to the Jesus who lived as a man among men. “Give us back,” they ask, “the Jesus of the Gospels.” And

it is good that men should seek Jesus of Nazareth; should begin as the disciples began, living again in thought among the scenes of His earthly life.

2. *The Quest that Failed.*—"He is not here." It is not among the dead things of the past that we shall find Him. The historic Christ is not enough for us (2 Cor. v. 16). The resurrection carried that life into the eternal order. He "sitteth at the right hand of God." The women who came to the tomb could not find Him, for they were seeking the living among the dead.

3. *The Quest that would not Fail.*—The angel told them that they were to leave the tomb and go back to Galilee. They were to return to familiar places and the ordinary duties of life. And there they would see Him again. And so it is still. When the Jesus whom we love seems to have forsaken us, and only a tomb seems left to which we can bring our gifts, we take up the task of service among the common things of life, and there we find Him again. For the risen Christ goes before us into every Galilee; we find Him when we obey His command. He is not "imprisoned in the tabernacle," but leading in the way of service along the dusty highways of the world. The disciples would have returned to Galilee in any case, but they would have returned crestfallen and sad at heart, feeling that they had lost their Master. But now they could return, knowing that they had lost Him for a little while only that they might have His companionship for ever. So they went back to the old familiar associations with a new gladness and a new hope.

C.—"AND PETER"

"But go your way, tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee."—ST. MARK xvi. 7.

IF (as is probable) St. Mark's Gospel represents St. Peter's teaching, we can see how the apostle cherished the remembrance of the special message to him from the risen Christ. We know (St. Luke xxiv. 34; 1 Cor. xv. 5) that early in the same day Jesus met Peter alone. What passed at that

interview we do not know; it was a secret that the apostle never told.

1. *A Familiar Note.*—When the disciples knew that Jesus was alive they must have wondered how His attitude towards them would be affected by His passage through death. Would He come back to them changed and unfamiliar? Could the old personal relationship be restored? The special message to St. Peter must have reassured them. Here was just the personal note with which they were familiar. He had not ceased to care for them as individuals. He still remembered their special needs.

2. *An Assurance of Forgiveness.*—The words, "I will go before you into Galilee," would recall the warning with which they were associated (see ch. xiv. 28). St. Peter, and perhaps the other apostles too, must have wondered whether he had forfeited his place in the Christian society. Perhaps he would remember the stern words of the Master (St. Matt. x. 33). But Jesus knew not only of St. Peter's sin, but also of his instantaneous repentance, and by His special message to the apostle He resolved every doubt as to his right to a place among His followers.

3. *A Call to Obedience.*—Jesus had already recognized St. Peter's natural gift of leadership (St. Luke xxii. 32); so now He sends him a special reminder of the duty of obedience. More than once he had shown an insubordinate spirit (St. Mark viii. 32; x. 28; xiv. 47), as though he knew better than the Master what was the right course to take. Now he is charged to remember that forgiveness must be followed by more loyal and trustful obedience. Repentance is not vain regret for the past, but a resolute determination to be faithful in the future. The message that restored Peter to his old place in the Christian society was also a warning to him that he must set an example of loyal obedience.

CI.—THE TESTIMONY OF EXPERIENCE

"She went and told them that had been with Him."

"They went and told it to the residue."—ST. MARK xvi. 10, 13.

[ST. MARK'S Gospel ends abruptly at verse 8. It seems probable that the closing section of the book was lost at an early date, and a later writer added a short summary of the facts needed to complete the story. The narrative is bald and quite unlike the style of St. Mark. But it represents an authentic early tradition.]

At the beginning (St. John i. 41, 46), so now at the end, we have the testimony of personal experience.

1. *Experience*.—In spite of all that Jesus had said to the disciples, the resurrection was a complete surprise to them. The unbelief of the apostles, on which the writer lays special stress, shows how little they expected any return of their Master. Nothing could have changed their despondency into gladness but actual experience. It was because they had seen that they believed (St. John xx. 29). The Christian Faith rests ultimately on the same basis of personal experience. It is a revelation to which faith responds.

2. *Testimony*.—It was impossible for those who had seen the risen Lord to keep the good news to themselves. Whether men believed the story or not, they knew that the responsibility of giving their testimony was one that they could not evade. It was a day of good tidings (2 Kings vii. 9), and they could not hold their peace. It was not so much public preaching as personal testimony that drew men into the Christian society. The disciples were to be "witnesses" (St. Luke xxiv. 48; Acts i. 8; ii. 32; v. 32), men who gave their testimony to what they *knew*. The generation of those who had "seen the Lord" passed away, but their testimony remains to assure us that we are not following "cunningly devised fables" when we rest our hopes on the fact that Jesus rose from the dead and took our humanity into heaven as the "first begotten of the dead" (Rev. i. 5).

CII.—THE GREAT COMMISSION

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."—**ST. MARK xvi. 15.**

WE are so familiar with the words that perhaps we hardly realise the heroic nature of the command that Jesus Christ laid on His disciples. They were to lay aside home ties and old associations, and go out into the great adventure, with no resources but the assurance of His presence.

1. *A Universal Commission.*—The idea of a universal religion was so new that even the disciples did not at once grasp its full significance. It was St. Paul who saw clearly how the new Gospel transcended all barriers of race and rank (Col. iii. 11). But Jesus claimed the whole world as His kingdom, and in ever-widening circles the Church expanded as men caught the inspiration of His command.

2. *A Universal Promise.*—The only qualifications for admission into the Christian society were the inner response of the soul to the truth (faith) and public profession of that acceptance (baptism). So the Church was not for the elect few, whose special goodness qualified them for admission; its doors were thrown wide open for all who would come in. The condemnation of being left outside was only pronounced on those who did not want to come in. (In view of the associations that have gathered around it, the old English word "damned" is a less satisfactory translation than the "condemned" of the Revised Version.)

3. *A Universal Presence.*—The promise is more explicit in St. Matthew xxviii. 20, but the signs that Jesus promised were evidences of His presence. They were the "greater works" that He had already told them that they should do (St. John xiv. 12). When the moral miracle of the Christian Gospel had vindicated itself, these special miraculous powers were withdrawn. But the promised presence is still with us while we obey the command. The missionary work of the Church is not one department of its activity, but the very secret of its life. We dare not claim His presence unless we are obeying His command. Faith and

courage can still achieve things that seem impossible, and the power of the spiritual over the material is a truth that even now we are only beginning to understand.

CIII.—THE SIGNS OF THE KINGDOM

“These signs shall follow them that believe.”—ST. MARK xvi. 17.

THE author is writing from the standpoint of experience. He believed that the “signs” that had actually accompanied the first preaching of the Gospel had been promised by Jesus as evidences of His continued presence with His disciples. The “signs” mentioned here fall into three groups:

1. *Manifestation in Service.*—The first and last are acts of mercy. The casting out of evil spirits and the healing of the sick were two of the most conspicuous ways in which our Lord had shown His care for the needs of men. By acts of bodily and mental healing the Church was to commend its claim to offer, in Christ’s name, the deeper gift of healing. They were “signs” of God’s desire to make men “every whit” whole. The laying on of hands was accompanied by anointing in the case of believers (St. Jas. v. 14).

2. *Manifestation in Worship.*—Speaking with tongues (“new” should probably be omitted) was, as St. Paul says (1 Cor. xiv. 22), “a sign not to them that believe, but to them that believe not.” Apparently it was a kind of ecstatic utterance in no known language, in which the soul tried to find expression for its emotions of praise and adoration. It was associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and was a “sign” that a new spiritual influence had come into a man’s life. The corresponding sign now is earnestness in worship.

3. *Manifestation in Protection.*—The author mentions two among many dangers that might be met with in missionary work (Acts xxviii. 5). If God still needed His servant, no danger could harm him, no serpent or poison could bring his work to an end till God willed.

It is this consciousness of being in the hands of God that has been at all times the strength of the Christian missionary (Isa. liv. 17). So the three groups of signs correspond to three qualities needed for the task that the disciples were charged with—sympathy, devotion, and courage. By his sympathy in service, by his earnestness in worship, by his courage in danger, men would recognize the true servant of Jesus.

CIV.—THE ASCENSION

“After the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven.”—ST. MARK xvi. 19.

THE word “received up” (*cf.* Acts i. 2, 11) is one of several words used to describe the ascension of our Lord. It suggests some special thoughts about the ascension.

1. It was the Divine Father who called up His Son into His immediate presence (Acts ii. 33; Phil. ii. 9). He was taken up into the eternal world by the same divine love that sent Him forth to suffer and die for men. His ascension, no less than His humiliation, was an act of obedience to the will of His Father. The incarnation was complete when the perfect humanity of Jesus, alive for evermore, became for ever one with the divine Being of God.

2. Heaven received its King (Acts iii. 21) “until the times of the restoration of all things.” The word suggests a rightful claim recognized. The spiritual universe opened its gates to receive the conqueror who brought back the assurance of a lost world redeemed. We no longer think of heaven as localized “above the bright blue sky,” but as a higher sphere of reality where God’s will is fully done. He who had always done the Father’s will was, even in His earthly life, “in heaven” (St. John iii. 13).

3. Two contrasts seem to be in the mind of the writer. There is the contrast between the world where “His own received Him not” and the world that welcomed to its throne Him whom men had lifted up on the Cross. And there is the contrast between the Lord who, having finished His task on earth, went up to the Father, “there

to appear in the presence of God for us," and the disciples, with their task still before them, who went out to serve and suffer for His sake. They, too, would be "received up into heaven" (St. John xiv. 3) when their appointed work was done. In the person of Jesus Christ the eternal world opened its gates to the whole human race. He carried His human nature into heaven, that every human life that is made one with Him may follow Him thither. "I go to prepare a place for you . . . that where I am, there ye may be also."



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